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BREATHLESS THEY STARED AT THE DOOMED DETECTIVE LONG AFTER THE HIDEOUS
WORK OF THAT DEADLY MECHANISM WAS COMPLETE.

OR, Saul Sunday's Six Sensations.

An Over-the-Range Romance.

BY JOS. E. BADGER, JR.,
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OF DENVER," "OLD '49," "PISTOL JOHNNY,"
"NOR'WEST NICK," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A BRACE OF PILGRIMS.

"An' ye never did, stranger? Cross yer heart
ye hain't fergot?"

"To the best of my knowledge, I never did."

"But that's it! Some fellers' minds is so
eternal slippy that when ye think ye do ye don't;
like drappin' a knot-hole in the water an' then
lookin' fer the dent next week. 'Tain't thar, an'
maybe you hev to study out ef it ever was thar
—see?"

"I've got a good memory for faces, and
though I'd like mightily to please you, friend, I
must stick to it: I never met you or your coun-
terpart before this very afternoon."

"An' ye couldn't play ye hed? Couldn't lie

jest the weentiest bit in life? I reckon I'd be mad enough fer to lick ye all over ten counties when I ketched ye out, but—sufferin' grandpap! how fat I'd git afore that lie lost all its marrer!"

Carl Rank laughed outright, and small marvel, for the combination was comical in the extreme. The small, gray-blue eyes rolling upward. The wide, thin-lipped mouth closed with an audible smack. The long, goat-like beard tipping his chin fairly quivered with ecstasy in keeping with that enthusiastic outburst. Yet his countenance was melancholy personified, and never more strikingly so than when he feebly joined in the laugh his words had awakened.

"Heap funny, ain't it, pardner?" he sighed, in mournful resignation, jerking up his long legs until his heels could beat a tattoo on the flanks of the woolly little burro he bestrode.

"I really beg your pardon, but—"

"Fer laughin'? Don't ye do it, stranger, don't ye begin to do it! Say glory that ye hain't clean fergot how to twist the lip o' ye that way! Give thanks that ye kin laugh—a ginewine laugh that jest nat'rally burns itself an' hain't made to order. Time was—but what's the use?"

With a long breath that was a sigh in itself, Saul Sunday jerked up the drooping head of his humble mount and again plied his heels briskly to quicken its snail-like pace.

Carl Rank held his peace for the moment, covertly yet keenly scrutinizing his chance companion, trying to separate the seeming from the real. A man of the world, he prided himself on his skill at reading human nature and penetrating disguises, but for once in his life he found himself wholly at fault.

If Saul Sunday was playing a part, then he was proving himself a past master in the art of acting.

To all seeming their meeting had been purely accidental. For reasons of his own, Carl Rank had preferred hiring a horse at Up-grade City to taking passage on the coach which ran from that mining town to its rival just across the range: "Down-grade" as the natives of the Eastern slope called it; "P. M. City" as those on the Pacific side of the Range headed their letters.

Carl Rank had fairly crossed the "Backbone" before meeting with any adventure, or seeing aught of human life; but then he overtook a fellow pilgrim who was sadly battling with a huge-headed "Arizona canary," or burro, whose ideas of progress seemed far less advanced than those of its present master.

"Takin' mine, stranger, so ye kin laugh ef ye feel the way," sighed the melancholy pilgrim, brushing a sleeve across his heated brow as he cast a glance over his shoulder. "Don't reckon ye want to trade fer a mighty—Git up, durn ye, critter!"

The burro obeyed, keeping pace fairly well with the horse ridden by Carl Rank, company lending its hairy legs more than usual speed.

The donkey-rider quickly introduced himself as Saul Sunday, bound for P. M. City, and Carl Rank admitted that their present destination was the same, though he had taken an instinctive dislike to the stranger at first sight.

Saul Sunday was tall, gaunt, big-jointed and awkward in seeming, though a portion of this might be owing to his mount, since he had to ride with stirrups far shorter than his legs, in order to save his feet from coming in contact with the rocks and stubs which plentifully bestrewed the rough trail.

Though his thin, long face was dolefully sad in its expression, and his tones such as might have done honor to a professional mute, Sunday was almost gaudily garbed, from his high, sleek silk hat down to his morocco-tipped congress gaiters.

His coat and trousers were of plaid, green and brown with red and gold hair-lines. His vest was white, with long nap that resembled wool or natural fleece, cut low to expose as much as possible of a marvelously starched shirt-bosom, in which shone three huge studs; each a fortune in itself if the seeming had been real.

A mate to these shining bits of cut glass helped to secure a flaming red scarf, above which rose the curving corners of an extremely high collar, once resplendent with starch and polish, but now showing plain evidence of a hot and dusty trail.

About his neck hung a heavy yellow cable, brought together in front by a massive slide, still further secured by passing through a buttonhole of his vest, then curving across his front to vanish in a pocket above his heart, making a gallant display of pinchbeck.

So far as the keen eyes of Carl Rank could discover, Saul Sunday was unarmed, in the usual acceptation of the term, though he balanced a rather odd-looking staff before him which might prove itself no mean adjunct to a hand-to-hand combat.

This staff itself was about five feet in length, shaped of some sort of highly polished wood, and with the lower end armed with a short, sharp spike. A bright band of silver ornamented the staff, about a foot below the upper extremity, but there was nothing else to betray the purpose for which that overgrown cane was carried.

"A fifth-rate sport, and by no means a favorable specimen of that genus, either!" mentally decided Carl Rank, and as soon as he could do so without too plainly betraying his purpose, he quickened the pace of his horse, meaning to leave the donkey rider to follow at his leisure.

But Saul Sunday did not or would not accept that hint, and by dint of heel, voice and lashing, he kept his burro within talking distance until Rank thought better of his impulse and permitted his mount to take a more agreeable pace.

"Sufferin' grandpap!" sighed Saul Sunday, using his sleeve as a handkerchief to save time and trouble. "Time was—An' now ye ketch me figgerin' as deck-hand on a durned dunk! Workin' my passidge by the sweat o' my brow! An' raisin' a crap o' corns on both heels o' me—Git up, you! Ye kin ef ye will, an' ef ye won't—why not? Stiddy, hon! Look at 'im, now! Ain't he a jo-dandy?" and Saul Sunday cocked his head on one side, melancholy admiration slowly creeping into his eyes and lighting up his gaunt visage.

"Three year old come hay. Sound as a dollar. Kin walk a quarter, trot a half, run a mild inside o'—Don't want to trade, stranger?"

"Hardly," laughed Carl Rank.

"Wouldn't ef I was you," sighed Saul, relapsing into the doleful dumps which seemed his natural condition. "I wouldn't lie to ye fer nothin', an' a more wuthless critter never shed ha'r onto a new pa'r o' britches. As I started to say, he kin walk, trot an' run, ef ye got plenty o' time to set down an' watch him do it. Or, ef ye keep holdin' a year o' corn or a bun'le o' oats right afore his nose, he'll do all three turns atwixt sun an' sun. He's fast—when ye tie him!"

"No doubt he'll serve to carry you to your destination. You stop at P. M. City, I think you intimated?"

"Long enough to hunt it through from eend to eend. Long enough fer to make sure that p'izen critter—You're dead sure ye never run up ag'inst sech a feller, stranger?" with a wistful light coming into his steel gray eyes as they lifted to the face of his fellow pilgrim.

It was a strong, if not exactly handsome face—the face of a cool and level-brained business man. Carl Rank was apparently about forty years of age, his close-cropped hair and the little tufts of beard left unshaven beneath his ears, just beginning to show the light frost of coming age.

He was plainly, neatly garbed in a business suit, the only exception being that he wore high-topped riding-boots.

Like Saul Sunday, he carried no weapons visible to a casual glance; but, unlike that worthy, he wore no ornaments, real or counterfeit.

In return for the sighing confidence of Sunday, Rank had announced himself as the agent of a business syndicate, sent by them to that region for the purpose of looking up promising investments in the mining line.

"Not to purchase, of course, but simply to investigate and report for their further consideration, you understand," with a faint smile as his keen black eyes roved swiftly over their wild surroundings. "I'm not what you might call a timid man, but I'd hardly care about bearing much wealth through a region with a reputation like this."

"Down-grade, they said back yender, an' said it in sech a way that mought make ye reckon it was mighty nigh to purgatory at the best; but it never fazed me a weenty bit. Why should it? An' me livin' all this lonesome time chuck up in the middle o' sheel itself?"

"Then it's not a bosom friend you are hunting after?" asked Carl Rank, the ghost of a laugh in his dark eyes as they shot a keen glance into that lugubrious countenance. "It's not love that urges you on in quest of this fellow that looks like you?"

"Sufferin' grandpap!" fairly snorted the man of sorrow, his gaunt features fairly glowing with angry denial. "Fri'nd—love—me?"

"Excuse me, dear sir; I really didn't mean—"

"Hain't I got used to it? Ef I didn't hed, I better would, fer that's jest what nigh every critter slings out at me when I ax kin they put me onto the trail of a feller that looks like me. Is he a twin? they ax. Is he got a strawberry mark onto his karkiss anywhar? Why don't ye put a bell onto him? An' sich like durned fool jokes as them!"

"Have you heard of him up in this region, then?"

"Heerd o' him?" in doleful disgust. "Did I ever hear o' anythin' else ever sense—Stranger, kin ye even begin to 'preciate what it mought be ef a p'izen critter was to steal your name an' your face an' your tongue an' your bornin'-place an' all other things 'cept the eternal misery an' shame he left ye to stagger up under when ye come to know that all the world an' its neighbors was markin' ye down as the durned scamp an' barefacedest 'postor that ever pumped breath out o' a jail?"

Before Carl Rank could make reply to this complicated query, the shrubbery bordering the trail parted to let a footman pass, and as he

faced the brace of pilgrims with leveled weapon he sharply cried:

"Halt! hands up, gents!"

CHAPTER II.

FALLING AMONG THIEVES.

"SUFFERIN' grandpap!"

"It'll be suffering grandson if you don't elevate your dukes!"

Sharp and clear came the words from behind a sable mask, and dim though the twilight was growing, the pilgrims could detect a dangerous sparkle of the eye that gazed at them along the leveled tube of death.

"No thoroughfare this way, gents, so you needn't take the trouble to think o' tryin' the crawfish act!" came a deep, hoarse voice from close in their rear.

Involuntarily both men cast a backward glance, to see several armed men barring their retreat. And as they once more looked ahead, it was to see the first speaker reinforced by two other masks.

"I jest knowed it!" groaned Saul, his gaunt figure sinking into a limp heap as though his backbone had suddenly melted. "It's all 'long o' that feller that looks like me!"

Carl Rank uttered never a word as his empty hands rose above his head the instant he realized the worse than folly of trying either flight or resistance. His face grew deathly white, but only in that did he betray lack of nerve.

"Yank that howling cur—so!"

As the chief began his harsh command, a snake-like coil shot out of the bushes and a noose settled over Saul Sunday's shoulders, followed by a savage jerk that tumbled him headlong to the rocky trail.

"Heels up, then, if it likes you better!" laughed the grim chief as he stalked forward and slipped an arm through the reins dropped by the luckless pilgrim, his gloved fingers gripping the bridle of the horse ridden by Carl Rank.

"I'll climb down of my own accord if you say the word, sir," half-laughed Rank as he witnessed his companion's tumble. "I'm only sorry I haven't got more with me as a reward for your trouble, but I fear you've made a waterhaul, this time."

"I've got you, and that's enough for the present," coldly retorted the masked personage, his free hand keeping the traveler covered all the time. "Keep your dukes elevated while 'lighting, unless you want to come down in a heap. Pinch him, Shawl-neck!"

Carl Rank left the saddle, to be gripped by strong hands the instant his feet struck the trail. His arms were drawn backward and a noose slipped around them, passing up above his elbows and closing tightly, rendering him perfectly helpless for the time being.

At the same time two other masks pounced upon Saul Sunday, after the same fashion, the noose of the lasso holding him harmless. As its strain was slackened, his captors assisted him to arise, a gloved hand closing over his lips as he opened them to speak.

"Shet, clam ef ye don't want to see how the roots o' yer clapper looks like, critter!" mumbled a harsh voice in his ear.

"Look after the critters, Duck-wing," commanded the chief, resigning the animals to the care of a mask who hastened forward. "Bring the game along, Gamecocks, and we'll soon see whether they are pure feather or simply dung-hills."

"Time was—" began Sunday, only to be cut short by a vicious grip on the neck that effectually cut his speech short.

The chief of the Gamecocks led the way through the shrubbery, up a narrow defile leading away from the stage trail, followed by the men having his captives in charge.

Directly after leaving the trail, a heavy sack was cast over each captive's head, thus completely blinding them, but the strong hands upon their arms served as guides, and though the way was intricate and rough beyond the ordinary, their progress was satisfactory to their captors.

With a number of abrupt turns and changes, of course, the helpless pilgrims were forced along for fully half an hour, when the chief came to a halt in a comparatively level spot, surrounded by stunted trees and scrubby bushes.

Night had fairly set in, but the heavens were clear and already the twinkling stars began to afford some light, while only the mountain peaks kept the nearly full moon from adding its silvery beams to the scene.

At a gesture from their chief, the Gamecocks removed the sacks and fell back a pace or two, leaving the prisoners standing unhampered in the center of the circle thus formed.

Carl Rank was pale, his strong features sternly set like one who fully appreciated the peril of his situation.

Saul Sunday leaned feebly on his polished staff, staring about him with lack-luster eyes, the picture of resigned misery. For once in his life that glib tongue seemed to have lost its passion for wagging.

The chief of the Gamecocks stepped forward, and leisurely, keenly scanned each face in turn,

though his glowing eyes rested longest on that of Carl Rank, as though in that quarter lay his deepest interest.

"Waterhaul, is it?" he laughed, harshly, as he drew back a pace to add: "Well, maybe yes, maybe no. Dominic!"

One of the cowed figures instantly entered the circle in obedience to that call.

"Go through the gentlemen and see how they pan out."

Rapidly and thoroughly the outlaw obeyed, emptying pockets with a deftness that told tales as to his earlier profession in life, placing the articles as brought to light on a flat rock near his chief.

If robbery, pure and simple, actuated the Gamecocks, they must have witnessed this process with gloomy feelings, for very little of value was brought to light.

A few dollars, the majority of which came from the pockets of Carl Rank, were revealed. A brace of revolvers, one from each captive, and a long-bladed clasp-knife from Saul Sunday summed up the armory.

Dominic gingerly touched those gaudy studs and the huge cable, but spat contemptuously over a shoulder as he left them in position.

"Dollar store, an' got mighty bad skunk at that!" he sniffed, in true pickpocket disgust.

"No remarks, if you please," grimly reproved the chief.

A flat memorandum-book taken from Carl Rank caused him to start forward with a suppressed cry, but this was supplemented by a curse as he found, on swiftly rippling the leaves, that each page was blank.

"I expected to begin to make notes at P. M. City, your Honor," the owner quickly said, a faint smile moving his firm lips.

"Of what nature?" swiftly demanded the chief.

"On business, of course."

"In cipher, no doubt?"

Carl Rank lifted his brows in surprise, but promptly replied:

"Why should I? I never expected other eyes to see the notes, when made. And what harm if they should?"

"You have no secrets, then?"

"None more serious than every man of my age naturally has. Of course there are many little items which—"

"Might tighten a noose about your throat?" laughed the chief as his captive hesitated for an instant. "Am I right?"

"Not to my knowledge, sir, but I'm glad you let that suspicion drop, for now I'm sure of what I could only suspect at first: you've made a mistake in your man this time!"

"Is that so?" drawled the outlaw, in mock surprise.

"How can I help thinking that way when you speak of a noose in connection with my throat?" frowned the prisoner.

"Rather disagreeable, isn't it?" still with that ugly sneer perceptible in his voice. "Possibly you'd be more at home with a grip on the other end of the rope?"

Carl Rank folded his arms over his chest, the starlight showing his face hard-set and passionless. As an unarmed man surrounded by unscrupulous enemies, he seemed to realize the folly of resenting even an insult of this nature.

The chief of Gamecocks gazed into his pale face for a brief space in silence, seemingly striving to read the hidden truth therein, but then he abruptly demanded:

"What is your name?"

"Carl Rank."

"Your profession?"

"I have studied law, and I've been a broker. At the present time I am simply an agent for a syndicate of capitalists, seeking profitable investments in the mining line."

"That search brought you to this region?"

"It did. I heard of several promising leads at or near P. M. City, and came here to investigate them."

"That was your sole business in these parts?"

"It was, and is."

"You couldn't possibly tell a lie, could you?"

"I might possibly stretch the truth a little, purely in the way of business, if that is what you mean," was the cool response.

"We'll play it was, for the present," nodded the chief, turning abruptly toward Saul Sunday, who seemed gradually recovering from the combined shock of his capture and his ugly tumble from the saddle.

"Saul Sunday—from Texas—sport by trade, an' critter o' sorer an' tribulations by misfortune!" spluttered the man with the staff, not waiting to be questioned by his captor.

"Partner of his, may I ask?" with a short nod in the direction of Carl Rank.

"Ef you say so, boss," meekly sighed the sport, nervously fingering his staff as it stood upright between them, its spike driven into the firm ground. "I never clapped the two eyes onto him afore this werry evenin', but ef you say so, pard goes."

Under his nervous grip the silver band about his staff, and of which mention has been made, slipped down a few inches, the action causing the top to divide into four quarters, each section having been cunningly hollowed out to

form when closed a receptacle for a square of black velvet.

Each corner of this velvet was securely fastened to one of the four sections, and now that these lay open, a miniature table was formed by the cloth, breast high to its owner.

Saul Sunday slipped a hand into a secret pocket, producing several articles which had been overlooked or scorned by the searcher, and as the Gamecock watched him curiously, his long fingers moved swiftly over the velvet, manipulating three shells, each being one-half of an English walnut, free of kernel.

In addition to these shells, Saul Sunday held a little black ball formed of soft rubber, and as he deftly moved the articles back and forth, he broke into a low, monotonous sing-song:

"Here she goes an' thar she goes—over an' under, top an' bottom, with a twist o' the wrist thar'll cheat the keenest pa'r o' eyes ever any man owned! I'll cheat ye ef I kin, fer that's the way I make my livin'. Don't none o' ye bet more'n you're able fer to lose without a kick, fer what you put up I'll rake down—it's part o' the game, an' I couldn't play it any other way ef I was to try never so!"

With a deft motion he strung the three shells in an even row, giving his hands a bland flourish above the board as he straightened up and glanced professionally around the little circle, seemingly forgetting how that audience had been formed.

"All set, an' fortune awaits the lucky gent as kin onkiver the little joker! Nickels, dimes an' dollars! You can't win ef you don't bet, an' though I'm dead sure to pull down what you put up, until I do you kin keep on a-hopin' heap big! An', as the sweet singer o' Michigan hath it, 'It's better to hev bet an' lost, then never to hev bet at all!'

"Who's the lucky man to take the fu'st whack at the bank o' Solemn Saul, the Sad Man from San Saba?"

"I'm calling you, Saul Sunday," sharply uttered the chief, tapping the sport on an arm as he distinctly added: "How much blood-money did you get for running down Silky Steel?"

CHAPTER III.

"THE FELLOW THAT LOOKS LIKE ME!"

WITH slowly drooping lower jaw Solemn Saul stared at the sable cowl-like mask covering the face of the chief of the Gamecocks, seemingly stupefied by that sharp, almost vicious query.

"Mournful Moses!"

"How many ducats stuck to your fingers when you rid Falcon City of Sultana Sate and Ross Kearney?"

The man with the shells shrunk visibly before those blazing orbs, and more feeble sounded his ejaculation:

"Weepin' Jemima!"

"And the Shivering Asp episode, Sunday?" pitilessly persisted the chief, playing with his victim in cat-like manner. "You must have made big money out of that bit of bloodhound work. Did you invest it all in these gay sparklers?"

With a gloved finger he tapped the counterfeit diamonds studding the wilted bosom of the still more wilted sport.

"I knowed it!" groaned Saul, dejectedly, yet with a trace of wakening fierceness in his tones. "I've bin lookin' out fer jest some sech back kick, an' hyar she am, powerful death an' sure to kill!"

"Shall I go still further back, Sunday?" persisted the outlaw leader, his tones growing softer, more than ever like the purring of a human tiger. "Shall I trace your career to its beginning? Shall I call to mind one and all of the poor devils whom you have hounded to State's Prison or to the gallows? Or—have I said enough to show you what a double-distilled ass you were to carry your fantasies into this region, where friends of your later victims were almost certainly to be found?"

"Sufferin' grandpap to miseryation an' eternal cussedness!" abruptly exploded the man with the shells, tearing the hat from his head and trampling it underfoot in an excess of fury.

The chief of the Gamecocks swiftly leaped back a yard or two at this passionate gesture, his right hand lifting a revolver to a level with the heart of his captive, but his finger lingering on the trigger as he cried out sharply:

"Steady, you man-hunter! Riddle him if he tries a break, men!"

With an ominous briskness the masked figures drew closer until their leveled weapons almost touched the two pilgrims from all sides.

Carl Rank stood unmoved, his arms folded, his face showing whitely under the stars, but revealing no greater emotion than he had betrayed from the first.

Solemn Saul flung up his empty hands; his tones husky and uncertain as he hastily spluttered:

"Flag o' truce, gents! Fer the love o' Moses don't blizzer! 'Tain't mad at you I was gittin', but at the p'izen critter that's bin a honey-locust thorn into the side o' me fer more'n I kin count 'thout jest b'illin' over an'—I say, boss, your Honor, sir!"

His voice changed abruptly and took on an almost pitifully wistful cadence as he reached out

his trembling hands toward the chief of the Mountain Gamecocks.

"You have said, and it don't go down worth a cent!"

"Do you know him, boss? Kin you tell a pore devil that's almost driv' plum an' clean crazy-distracted 'long o' his pizen didoes, whar ur how I kin run up ag'inst the feller that looks like me?"

"Is that your little game, Solemn Saul?"

There was no immediate answer, the sport gazing steadily into the glowing eyes of his captor, as though trying to trace therein a ray of hope. But he gave a long breath, his hands slowly sinking to his side, his tall, gaunt figure actually seeming to wilt and shrink inside his garments.

"It's part o' the cuss put onto me, I reckon!" he meekly mumbled, all trace of animation vanishing. "Go on with the funeral, gents! I'm all ready but the overcoat, an' I ain't kickin' whether that fits or not. They's jest one thing—ef it ain't wenturin' to ax too mighty much, boss, sir, your Honor?"

"Out with it, but play white, Saul Sunday!"

"Ef you'd jest make the whole big enough fer to kiver up two, boss, while you're 'bout it."

"For your partner, you mean?" with a swift glance toward Carl Rank.

"Most any kind o' hole'd sarve fur's I'm consarned, boss," calmly added the man with the shells, his voice growing hard and earnest as he finished. "But ef the time ever comes—an' come it's bound to, sence the p'izen critter is scattered all over the eternal kentry! Ef the time ever comes when you find out your mistake, by runnin' up ag'inst 'nother Saul Sunday, pay the debt you'll owe me by callin' in his checks! Fill him so full o' holes the wind wouldn't know it was blowin' through him! Carve your initials all over him! Make your mark from top to toe, an' stamp it mighty deep!"

"I'm to do all this when I meet up with Saul Sunday, you say?"

The impassioned sport gave a little start at that peculiar tone, and for a brief space gazed steadily into the eyes of his captor.

"Do it all, an' more too ef ye kin, when ye meet up with the p'izen critter that looks like me—that's what I ax, boss. An' more—ef you don't think I'm tryin' to rub it in too mighty thick. When you've done that much, tote the karkidge here. Open the hole you've chucked me in. Plant the warmin't—but put him on the bottom whar I kin hold him down onte! Gab'r'el toots fer gettin' up!"

"That's all I ax, boss, sir, your Honor. Ef it wasn't fixed like that, the p'izen critter would get the start o' me an' freeze to my seat in the next world, jest as he's stole my face, my name, my tongue, an' even my bornin' place!"

Wild, extravagant as all this doubtless reads, lacking the intensely earnest manner and tones of the speaker, as it necessarily must when transferred to cold type, not one who listened but what was strongly impressed by those swift sentences.

"You think to cram all that stuff down me?" scornfully cried the chief of the Gamecocks. "You think to play me for a fool, as you've already played so many poor devils—to their undoing?"

"I'm mighty nigh past thinkin' or hopin' fer anything, boss," with a doleful sigh that seemed to come from the very soles of his congress gaiters. "I've see'd lies travel on the cheek o' truth so fur an' long tha. I never 'low to see the gospel facts ketch up ag'in. But I do say this much: I ain't what you think I be. I ain't the critter you want. I be Saul Sunday, from San Saba. I'm the only man that hes a honest right to that name, but—"

"And these tools?" sharply demanded the chief, tapping the ingenious table with the muzzle of his pistol. "They were never used in Bed-rock, in Quivering Asp, in Falcon City?"

"Ef ye said 'bused, you'd be mighty right neader right, boss," sighed the man of manifold trials. "They wasn't giv' a chance fer anythin' better'n that, fer when I hit each burg, it was only to be kicked out, body an' britches! Fer why? The feller that looks like me hed hit the towns ahead o' me!"

"Yet you are Saul Sunday! You are called the Sad Man from San Saba? You run the shell game?"

"Beca'se they ain't nothin' better left fer me, boss; but time was when never a gayer rooster flopped a wing or crew a crow! Time was when my walk run the len'th o' the San Saba an' I was knowed so mighty well that the only show I hed to ketch a buckle with 'nother game, was to powder my gills an' play I hed the army or the roup. Time was—but time ain't no longer—wuss luck!"

"The same game he played down to Quiverin' Asp, boss," gruffly called out one of the Gamecocks.

"The same game he played—didn't I hear tell when I hit the town?" lugubriously amended Saul Sunday, but with a touch of venom in his tones that told of reviving confidence.

"You're determined to stick to that preposterous yarn?"

"The truth is mighty an' must prevail," quoted Solemn Saul, sighing heavily as he added:

"But it's mighty slow in gittin' thar, all the same!"

"Who is this fellow that looks like you, then?"

"Ef I've axed me that question once, boss, I've peated it a million times over!" gloomily said the man with the shells, his bony fingers mechanically shifting the implements of his calling. "Tain't so often I play to lose, but I never yit could win *that* knowin'. Ef you was to ax me what he would be, ten minutes after I meet up with him—I could tell ye that, too mighty quick!"

"You are on his trail, then?"

"I've bin on it this two year past, boss, but ef I'm any nearder ketchin' up now then I was fust off, I don't know it. He's wuss then any flea I ever tried to crack, but I'll keep on a-tryin' onless you shet off my wind this racket. It'd be money in my pocket ef ye would, but I can't help hopin' you'll let me hev a fa'r shake at the critter. I'd hate to go an' leave him splurgin' 'bout in a decent name; the name that come down to me from my kin."

"A name you have never disgraced, of course?"

"Wish't I never hed!" sighed Solemn Saul, with a gloomy shake of his head. "Wish't I never tuck a fool notion fer ter flop over the walk, an' hunt up a strange pit whar my feather wasn't knowed so well! But I was young, an' full o' sand, an' I wanted to show the world what sort o' chickens they could raise up in ole San Saba. An' so—ef I mought tell ye jest how it all come about, boss?"

The chief cast a glance toward the east, lightened considerably as the moon climbed higher.

"Go ahead, Sunday. The moon'll make it easier work fixing you two gentlemen for plantin', presently."

The pilgrim sport shrank visibly at this grim conclusion, but as quickly rallied, speaking rapidly, like one who means to make the most of a brief reprieve.

"I was raised in the San Saba walley, boss, an' was left pritty snug fixed by the old folks, when they went off the hooks. I hed a good ranch, well-stocked, with ducats enough to make a jingle in my kicks, when I shuck a foot. I was a gay young cock then, an' by the time I showed pinfeathers 'long the jaws o' me, pritty nigh every other man in the walley was ready to run ruther than try the feel o' my spurs. An' so—

"An' so, like many 'nuther fool younker, I 'lowed the hull world was my own jest fer the say so. An' so I tuck a bunch o' steers, an' driv' down Santone way, fer a market an' a racket in a new walk."

"Mebbe you kin guess how she panned out, boss?" with a regretful sigh, as he brushed a hand across his brows. "Mebbe you kin 'magine how mighty sudden the two eyes o' me was opened?"

"You're telling the story, Sunday; but cut it short!"

"Fust off I run up ag'in a two-legged critter that was jest honin' fer somebody to git away with his wealth—an' he showed up ducats no end! An' he was durned idjit 'nough fer to want to bet 'em off on the thinnest, slaziest, triflin'est no-'count game I ever see!" sighing dolefully as his fingers deftly shifted the shells and the little joker over the velvet square.

"And of course you thought you could beat the fellow at his own game?" laughed the chief of the Mountain Gamecocks.

"That's what!" nodded Solemn Saul. "I went in to skin an' come out skun! Skun so clean I hedn't 'nough left fer to buy a lone drink! An' then—waal, the skinner tuck pity onto me, an' showed me how to work the shells. I tuck to it 'mazin', but ef I'd knowed how that p'izen feller, who looks like me—

"You want to find him, Sunday?" softly asked the chief.

"Don't I?" eagerly spluttered the man with the shells. "Jest show me whar I kin jump him, an' I'll feel ready to die the next—"

"He's right under my hand, you blood-hound!"

CHAPTER IV.

SOLEMN SAUL CALLS FOR A SHOW.

As these words dropped from his masked lips, the chief of the Mountain Gamecocks clapped a gloved hand heavily on the sport's shoulder, his muscles contracting until it seemed as though his grip would cause his finger-tips to meet through the flesh.

"Sufferin' grandpapi! An' I thought—but I might 'a' knowed it! I might 'a' knowed it was jest 'nother o' them p'izen jokes!" groaned the man with the shells, his gaunt visage losing its light, his head beginning to droop in dejection once more.

"It's a joke with a noose at the end for a period, my sinner of the glib tongue," grimly laughed the outlaw. "It will be a still more amusing jest to watch those gangling legs of yours fanning the atmosphere as your hoofs hunt support!"

"Hangin' hurts, they say, boss," slowly commented the sport, his tall figure straightening up and his little eyes firmly meeting that savagely-triumphant gaze. "I reckon it'd hurt

heapsight wuss when a man never done nothin' to deserve sech a cendin' to his trail."

"You *have* earned it, ten times over!" flashed the outlaw, no longer disguising his venomous disposition. "You have earned it by hunting to the gallows men worth a thousand such lives as the one I hold in the hollow of my hand."

Solemn Saul cast a deliberate glance around over the masked men, his eyes returning to the hidden face of their leader before speaking:

"I reckon it's thar, boss, ef you like to take it. You've got a heap o' critters ready to back up your word. From the looks of 'em I dare say you wouldn't hev to say it two times over?"

"Answer for me, lads!" cried the chief.

"Bet you wouldn't, boss!" came the chorus.

"It was easy 'nough to tell that much without words," nodded the sport, with the coolness of utter despair. "Ef it's hang, hang bes to go, I reckon. But—give me a show, boss!" with sudden energy as his bony hands went out appealingly, though he made no effort to shake that firm grip from his shoulder or to touch his captor.

"For you to slip through our fingers, as you have slipped through so many others, almost as good!" sneered the chief.

"Soft soap nor yit hog fat couldn't fetch that 'bout while you've got the corral built so pesky tight, boss," gloomily muttered the mau of misery as he cast a meaning glance about them. "I'd skin out ef they was a hole left open—you'd call me wuss then a fool ef I said I wouldn't. Ef you're dead sot on hangin', murder goes, that's mighty plain; but I'd like fust to know jest what I've done to airn sech a send-off, boss?"

"By coming to these parts as a cursed blood-hound of the law! By coming here as a detective on the scent of blood-money, you cur!" hotly flashed the chief.

"An' me from San Saba! An' me a Texas chicken!" ejaculated Saul Sunday in a tone of mingled anger and disgust.

"What has that to do with it?" growled the other.

"Jest this, boss, sir, your Honor," replied Sunday, his tones full of painfully forced politeness. "They don't raise none sech in the Lone Star State. We kin stand a sheriff, becase we've got to. We kin let a jedge pump wind, fer they's the hull United States back o' him. An' in some o' the big towns they kin even let p'licemen walk the streets in daytime, late years. But we draw the line at them. An' ef you was to rake the State over from bound to bound, you couldn't find one o' them p'izen critters you call 'tectives—onless in the shape of a bundle o' bones, with more holes in the top then ever nature made fer eyes to see through!"

"You are from Texas, you say?"

"From the San Saba Valley—an' I'm wishin' I was back thar, right now, you bet!"

"And you are a detective?"

"An' you air a—gentleman!"

The title was hardly the one Saul Sunday started to pronounce, but as he made the substitution, after a pointed pause, his meaning was amply clear to the chief as well as his Gamecocks.

It was a risky venture, under the circumstances, and for a moment it seemed as though the prisoner must surely pay the penalty of a too glib tongue. The cold muzzle of a revolver fairly touched the junction of his brows, and the outlaw glared at him over the barrel.

But Saul never flinched nor lifted a hand to avert his impending doom. To do so would be useless, but few men could have resisted the temptation.

"Say your prayers, Saul Sunday!"

"Ef I ain't ready to go, pardner, prayin' wouldn't help me none so mighty late in the day," was the calm response, that battle of the eyes continuing. "Ef you've got to do it, let flicker! But if you're white, boss, you'll give a pore devil a show fer his little stake!"

Almost involuntarily the chief drew back, slightly lowering his weapon, though its muzzle still covered the breast of his prisoner. He had not looked for such nerve, and it seemed to impress him, even against his will.

"You're game, by the eternal!"

"I'm a Texan, boss," with a short, hard laugh, as though that title said all that was essential.

"But all the more surely the Saul Sunday who hounded good lads to a shameful death on the gallows."

"Dollars ag'in cents that you cain't prove it, boss."

The chief laughed shortly at this challenge, shrugging his broad shoulders as he retorted, grimly:

"I'm running no chances, thank you, Sunday, and I'll string you up on general principles."

"Better that then on a rope, anyway," sighed the man with the shells, his little eyes catching a new light as the Gamecocks broke into a brief laugh at his feeble jest.

Whatever else the fellow might be, he was no fool. He realized the folly of hoping to gain mercy by prayers or pleading, but might there not be a frail hope in bluff or impudence?

It was a chance, and drowning men will catch at straws, they say.

"Look yere, boss!" he cried, assuming far

more confidence than any man could possibly feel in such a perilous predicament. "You're a thoroughbred. I kin see it in the two eyes o' ye. Ef I ain't 'way off, you'd nigh as soon gamble as chaw chuck when you're hungry."

"What do you know of me or my character?" flashed the chief, his manner showing even plainer than his words how hot his suspicions were growing.

"Not a durn thing, boss, ef you'd ruther hev it that way," was the hasty response. "I jest went by the eyes o' ye. Never met ye afore, to my knowin', an'—ef I don't tromp on a corn by sayin' so—hope may never see you ag'in after this night is old."

"You never will—in this world, at least," laughed the other.

"An' we'll be so mighty busy tryin' our new wings in t'other, we won't hev time to know we ever met down here," sighed Saul Sunday, his fingers once more manipulating the shells and the little joker by the growing light of the rising moon. "An' so—time is runnin' out, sir, boss, your Honor! Time an' tide an' the little joker cain't wait fur no slug-a-beds, an' ef ye ain't smart enough fer to ketch 'em on the wing you're gwine to git left—bad!"

"I've caught you, and the rest can wait."

"Don't you never let up when you git a grip, pardner?" coaxingly asked the sport, his fingers still moving briskly. "You're a thoroughbred, or the eyes o' ye tell lies! An' as sech—play me a whack to see ef I hang or go free!"

"We have played, and you lost when I roped you in the trail."

"Ain't I to hev any show a-tall? Must I go up the flume jest fer runnin' up ag'in a brace-game when I never dreamed o' sech bein' in the road?"

"You should have counted the cost before taking up this trail, you hound of the gallows!" flashed the chief, venomously. "You came to hang others, if you could bring it about by lying or trickery. If you hang instead, 'tis but poetical justice."

"That's heap bad, but hangin' fer 'nother feller that looks the same make is mighty sight wuss!" groaned Sunday, for a brief space looking to the full as dejected as he surely must have felt at heart.

"You still stick to that silly fraud?"

"Ain't I bin holdin' out all 'long that he *was* a durned fraud? An' isn't it jest one more chance fer to prove him sech that I'm wantin' to win off o' ye, boss?"

"You have played and lost. You shall hang—I swear it!"

"Sufferin' grandpapi!" sighed the man of sorrow, heavily, but still clinging to the hope born of that first ray of light. "An' me that ticklish 'bout the throat—why, boss, I'll sneeze the hull cabeza clean off o' me afore you kin hafe hang me dead."

The masked chief lifted a hand as though feeling his tolerance completely exhausted, but before he could fairly make the signal which was to hurl his fellows upon the captives, Solemn Saul cried out:

"Hangin' goes, ef I cain't git no better terms, boss! But—jest try it one weenty whirl, I'm beggin' of ye, boss! Jest one try fer to onkiver the little joker. An' ef you win, you pick out the tree that you reckon 'd match my 'plexion best. Ef you lose—waal, sence nothin' shorter won't satisfy you but hangin', I'll choose a gooseberry bush fer my gallows!"

"Ting-a-ling!" laughed the chief, stirred from his grim ferocity despite himself. "And you'd still be like the Irishman: content to wait for the bush to grow tall enough, of course!"

"Jest try me ef you reckon I wouldn't!" enthusiastically cried the man with the shells, manfully playing the part he had set for himself, though he must have seen that it was time and breath spent in vain.

"And you, Carl Rank?" abruptly spoke the chief, turning to the other prisoner. "What have you to offer against pulling good hemp?"

"Nothing more than what I have already said," was the cool reply. "You have made up your mind to murder us, and nothing we can say will shake that determination."

"Good boy!" with a grim nod of approval. "You're not half bad, if you are found in evil company. At first off I fancied you were our quarry, and if this rascal had kept his lips buttoned up tight, perhaps I would have strung you up as the detective we're arter. As it is—you'll hang simply for being caught in bad company."

"Isn't that just a bit hard on me, sir?"

"You'll forget it all before the moon goes down," with a cruel laugh that told how utterly merciless the villain must be. "Try and console yourself with that thought. I've known many a stout lad go to his doom with a gay smile on his lips who hadn't one-half as good a comforter."

Carl Rank made no reply, but there was a dangerous gleam in his dark eyes as they returned that gaze. And unless his face belied him, he would have gone to death with grim joy if he could first have punished that pitiless rascal.

"Yellow Pile!"

"Ready, boss!"

"Go get the ropes. Lively, now!"

A grim silence fell over the little group after the outlaw thus designated moved away through the night. Even Saul Sunday showed no inclination to break the stillness, and he had apparently abandoned all hopes of saving his neck from the deadly noose.

Then—a wild, terrified yell came from the shadows, and the outlaw came crashing through the bushes, to chokingly gasp:

"Good Lawd, boss! Back thar—Boss Clay!"

"What of him, you idiot? Speak out!" thundered the chief.

"The Silver Spider—dead—stone dead!"

CHAPTER V.

THE SAVAGE AND THE KID.

"Kid!"

"Yes, father."

"I was just wondering where in blazes you had been skulking this week past."

"I've not been skulking, father."

"Glad to hear it!" with a sniff such as a grizzly bear might have fathered without shame. "Some might call it a hopeful sign, to see a contrary kid ashamed to meet his dad, but I'd rather have blank defiance from sun to sun rather than see a boy of mine show aught of the currish sneak."

There came no response to this gruff speech, though the one addressed cast a furtive glance to the right and left, much as though he felt tempted to break away even at the risk of being so branded.

If such was his intention, it was promptly dispelled. A heavy hand closed upon his shoulder and then slipped down to draw his hand through his father's arm.

"Satan trust you, Eno Savage, for I'll not!" the elder muttered, with a laugh that sent a brief shiver through the frame of his son. "I haven't seen you for a week past. I mightn't see you again for a month to come if I let this chance slip unimproved. We'll have a powwow all to our lonesome selves, kid!"

"Not with my consent if you mean to bring up that question again, father!"

"Then without your consent, kid!"

His sinewy fingers closed over the hand of his son as it started to slip from the crook. His arm seemed to grow fast to his ribs, holding the young man prisoner so firmly that nothing short of a desperate struggle could possibly have given him his freedom.

Ambrose Savage looked into the face of his youngest son, his huge mustache curling until a glimpse of his strong teeth became visible through the sandy hair. His big blue eyes won a yellowish sheen and still further increased his likeness to a grim old lion.

"Shall we give P. M. City a benefit, kid?" throwing all his power into that fiery gaze, trying to crush the spirit of rebellion before it could go further. "Shall I tuck you under my arm and tote you to the wigwam, like a runaway pappoose? Shall I beg, borrow or steal a shingle, to make the play still more realistic, kid?"

"I will go with you, sir. You are my father."

"Worse luck me! why don't you add?" grimly laughed his parent, but moving briskly down the street toward the goodly-sized building known to P. M. City as "The Wigwam."

The sun had set, but there was plenty of light left for the linked couple to be recognized by such of the citizens as chanced in their path while on their way home, and the manner in which those meetings were conducted spoke volumes.

One and all gave father and son ample room, some even crossing the street for that purpose. Some bowed respectfully, with a dim, uncertain smile such as only those who are thoroughly feared ever inspired; but the majority passed by with downcast or averted eyes.

"Of all mean things, I despise a cur that longs to snap at your heels, yet dare not even curl a lip!" pointedly said Ambrose Savage, as he lurched out of his course to rudely brush against two citizens of the latter class. "And this town can turn up more such currish whelps to the square rod than any other between drink and drink!"

There came no answer to this pointed insult, and laughing harshly the old fire-eater passed on.

A brief space brought the twain to the Wigwam: a two story building of frame, luridly painted over with the brightest vermillion, and with a fairly artistic Indian lodge depicted over the broad front door.

This door was hospitably open, and no shades obscured the wide windows on either side of the entrance. Through the glass shone bright lights, early as the hour was, and from within came the sounds of clinking glasses and merry voices.

Father and son crossed the threshold, pausing when just inside the door to glance quickly over the men gathered in front of the well-stocked bar.

Once again the grim reputation won by Ambrose Savage was significantly illustrated, by the abrupt cessation of talk and the quick moving to each side of his customers, leaving the middle of the bar clear for its owner, in case his throat should prove dry.

A ruddy glint shot through his big blue eyes as Ambrose Savage saw this, but his voice was almost bland as he spoke:

"Evening, gentlemen! Curly, pass the bottle and chalk it down to my account. Come, kid!"

Still keeping a firm though covert grip on the hand of his son, Ambrose Savage passed through the saloon proper, brushing aside the dark damask portieres which formed a convenient division between it and the space devoted to gambling beyond.

This division, also, was brilliantly lighted by chandeliers burning gasoline, a tank of which was stored beneath the building, the method of manufacturing the inflammable vapor being a never-fading curiosity to the larger portion of the Wigwam's customers.

A dealer sat at one of the faro lay-outs, and he bowed respectfully to his employer as Savage passed in. As yet no players had put in an appearance, but that was nothing out of the ordinary. As an "all night house," the Wigwam rarely got down to work so early in the evening.

Turning to the left, Savage opened a door and revealed a steep, narrow flight of steps, up which he motioned his son. Without a word Eno obeyed, followed closely by his parent.

A few moments later they sat at a small card-table in a lighted chamber, gazing steadily into each other's face.

There was a strong contrast between the pair, yet a close observer could trace a certain resemblance.

Ambrose Savage was huge of build, mighty of frame, and though he must long since have passed the three-score notch of life—since he could point with pride to sons who were within easy reach of two-score years—there was some truth in his proud boast that he was just in the prime of life. Certainly no one could truthfully accuse him of old age or decrepitude.

There were a few silver threads mingling with his tawny beard as it fell in waving masses over his swelling chest. A few more glittered in his head, and the silken locks were growing just a thought thinner above his broad, high forehead. Deep furrows marked his brows and shot away from the corners of his eyes, but age had no finger in tracing them; they were born of his grim scowls of defiance unto his fellow-men.

Only for that hard, grim, savage frown, his face must have been called handsome, for his features were strong, clean-cut and regular, his eyes large and keen, of the deepest blue.

Eno Savage, his youngest son, was often spoken of as "the odd sheep of the family." All the others—Boyd, Clay, and Dale—were more or less perfect images of their father in form and features, but only a resemblance could be traced in the youngest-born.

His hair was dark, almost black. His eyes were purple, rather than blue. His complexion almost that of a brunette. His features equally regular, but seemingly cast in a finer mold.

"Your mother more than me, kid!" slowly uttered Ambrose Savage, bringing that steady gaze to an end. "Yet you've got a touch of the old man—Old Boy, eh?—in your composition, after all!"

"Because I will not bend, father?"

"Better bend than break—when it's my hand that lends the pressure, lad," not unkindly added the old man.

"Must we have the weary battle over again?" frowned the youth.

"Unless you've thought better of it—yes!"

Eno Savage gave a faint sigh, but there came a dogged look into his pale face at that fierce speech. And Ambrose Savage began to realize that, after all, this son was more his kin than that of the weak mother who died in giving him life.

"You're the kid, Eno," his tones growing softer, almost wistful. "When I look at you, I can see the poor mother—"

"Don't mention her name!" flashed the young man, his eyes aglow and the hand clenching as it rested on the table. "Play fair, if you're bent on having a fight, father!"

"Fair goes, and fight it is, kid!" grimly nodded the old man. "You still stick to that fool notion?"

"I still cling to my love, if that's what you mean, sir."

"And through fear of a lashing—with tongue if not with gad—you've spent a week in skulking?"

"Call it that if you see fit, father. I've kept out of your path because I knew a fight must follow. And you are my father, after all!"

"I always thought so, up to this bother, but now—"

"Don't make me forget it, sir!" came the sharp warning.

"That's all right. Your mother was a saint on earth; she's an angel in Heaven, if there's any such place. Be sure I'd be the last to throw a slur her way. What I meant was I couldn't see how I could have a boy that would fawn about the house of his family's bitterest enemy—no more."

"What proof have you that Enos Dunbar is your enemy, sir?"

"Haven't I already shown you proof enough, kid?"

"With all respect—no, sir," was the firm response. "You may dislike and be disliked by another without his being an enemy. But all this has been said over and over again. It may be repeated a thousand times more, without altering my position in the least."

"I love Miss Dunbar. She loves me. I have gained her pledge to marry me in due course, and if I live, if we both live long enough, I'll make her my wife."

That mighty fist rose and fell with a force that cracked the table-top from end to end. The giant leaned forward, his big eyes blazing, his beard curling, the picture of savage rage.

But Eno Savage never flinched. His face grew a shade paler, it may be, but in nothing else did he betray emotion, and his dark eye met that glare without flinching.

"His house shall witness a funeral before it knows a wedding in which my blood links with his! Rather than see that, I'd forget the mother who died to give you life, and crush that life out forever with my own hand!"

"So you told me once before, father," coldly spoke the son, his tones low and even, but all the more impressive from that very lack of fire. "I've spent a full week in trying to forget them."

"And now you come here to make me repeat them?"

"Hardly of my own free will, you must remember, sir," with a faint smile flitting across his face. "I only came because to refuse would have given the citizens something to chuckle over in their sleeves."

"Look you, kid, you're not all fool. I've showed you plenty plain that such a union as you propose is altogether out of the question. I have told you why I'd rather see you cold in a winding sheet than an ally of that cur—who'd sink his fangs in my throat if he dared!"

"I know you are not friends. I know that you claim Enos Dunbar is secretly working to drive you from the town. I know you say he would kill you if he only dared make the attempt."

"Yet you side with him against—"

"Not so, father. I would stand between you and all harm. I would shield your life with my own, and die in your stead without a sign if the worst should come to worst. But further than that I can't go—beyond that you have no right to ask me to go!"

"I'm over age. For years I've made my own living, nor cost you a copper. I'm old enough to choose my own course in life, and I have made that choice so far as I can. I love a pure, noble girl, and—"

"You'll never wed her, if I have to slit her throat!"

"Dare to harm a hair of her head, and I'll hang you high as Haman!"

CHAPTER VI.

UNDER THE LASH.

ENO SAVAGE sprang to his feet as he uttered that fierce vow, his forced composure broken, his eyes ablaze, his face white as death but full of resolution which greatly increased his resemblance to the Savage family.

He seemed to anticipate an assault from the parent whom he so fiercely defied, but none such came. Instead, Ambrose Savage smiled grimly, almost approvingly for the moment.

"Your mother wouldn't recognize her boy, but I can see my son!" he nodded, leaning back in his seat. "Keep the fire blazing, kid, and you'll grow to be a credit to the family even yet."

"You try to turn it into a jest, but it's gone too far for that. You have threatened to murder the woman whom I love as only a man can love a girl who has promised to be his wife. You have made me utter words such as no son should ever give his father, and—"

"What's the matter with taking 'em back, kid? I've no particular use for them."

"Nor for the owner of the lips that gave them utterance, sir! You must have realized as much, long months ago, when I refused to join you and those who should have been brothers to guide and guard instead of trying to lead astray in the paths of—"

"Don't try to preach, kid!"

"So be it, sir. I'll say no more on that point. I'll simply warn you once more that, father or not, I'll hunt you to the gallows if you dare to harm so much as a single hair of the head of the girl I hope to some day make my wife!"

With a cat-like swiftness marvelous in a man of his age and gigantic build, Ambrose Savage leaped upon his son, catching him by hip and shoulder, heaving him over his leonine head, holding him at arms'-length as though about to hurl him to the floor.

A moment thus, then he deftly placed the youth once more on his own feet, laughing harshly as he said:

"Just to show you how mighty little I care for the snarls of a kitten like you, kid! Shall I bear in mind the boyish threats of one whom I can handle so easily? Bah!" with a cold scorn in face and tone as he resumed his seat. "Grow a beard before you talk of hanging a man, little kid!"

"It may be grown long before I come to you."

again, father," said Eno, catching his breath, his lithe, graceful form visibly trembling after that dizzy uplifting. "Shall we part as friends, or—"

"Curse Enos Dunbar and all his breed, and I'll cross palms with you as a true Savage boy!"

Without a word further Eno Savage turned away and passed out of the chamber, his face very pale but very stern and fixed.

After all the ties of blood are hard to break, and though he had sad cause to know that Ambrose Savage was evil to the very core, he could not leave him in this fashion, for all time as he firmly believed, without feeling a sore tugging at his heart-strings.

The young man descended the steps and passed out of the Wigwam without speaking to or noticing any one of those present. His brain seemed on fire, and as he struck the street he bared his brow to the cool breeze coming down from the range.

He mechanically turned toward the wild wilderness, unnoticing the few stragglers whom he passed while clearing the town. His brain was in a whirl. His thoughts were confused. But through it all there rung in his ears the savage threats of his father.

"You'll never wed her if I have to slit her throat!"

From some lips so wild a threat might be passed over without more than a passing thought. But Ambrose Savage was not to be so classed.

"He'd do it, without a second thought! And I—Pd hound him to death, if I had to cut my throat at the foot of his gallows!"

Eno Savage shivered as the vow was mentally repeated, but it was true, all the same. So far he was a true son of "The Savage," as his father was known throughout P. M. City and the neighboring towns. He would be as good as his word if ever the occasion should arise; and no one knew better than himself how likely he was to be put to the test.

It was a sad, ugly affair in every point save that one bright ray: the love which had sprung into life and being, just when life seemed most dark and cheerless to the youth.

The first clouds began to gather years before, when he was little more than a lad. They came because he could not forget the dying prayer bequeathed him by his mother—the mother whom he never remembered seeing, who had died before her infant was one week old.

A faithful friend took charge of the paper on which that prayer was written, only giving it to the lad after he could read and was old enough to understand what right and wrong meant.

The dying mother seemed gifted with a prophetic eye, or she may already have learned how thoroughly evil her husband and his sons by a former wife had grown, for she warned Eno to be on his guard against their worst hours, and to ever hold by the right as her Bible would teach him.

That dying prayer was read and read again, never leaving the boy from that hour to the present. Rarely a day passed without his looking at those words, and as he grew older his will strengthened to carry out her instructions.

Only for this, no doubt he would have grown up as evil as his older half-brothers and his father sought to make him. With that talisman he was proof against all their plausible arts, even as the spirit he inherited from his father held him firm against their threats.

He now knew his family to be thoroughly evil, with crimes at their door sufficiently black to shut them forever from the light of day in case the truth should ever be wholly revealed. Yet—the ties of blood were too strong for him to break them while the faintest ray of hope remained by which one or all might be saved from the wrath to come.

Clinging to that vain hope, he might have gone on indefinitely, and no actual rupture would have taken place, but it was so written.

Eno Savage met and loved Weltha Dunbar.

Her father was a prominent citizen of P. M. City, already rich in this world's goods, and growing more wealthy each day of his life, thanks to his shrewd business judgment.

He owned several paying mines and was interested in others, both in that neighborhood and in other Territories.

A stern, secretive man, this Enos Dunbar, with only one weak point, so far as those about him could discover—his love for Weltha, his sole surviving child. But he could be stern, even harsh with her, as after events proved.

For many days the lovers kept their precious secret, not because they really feared harsh treatment from her loving parent, but simply because the marvelous discovery they had mutually made was too sweet to be shared with another.

Eno was the first to chafe under this secrecy, of course, and he it was who had to pray permission to make all known to Enos Dunbar. Then—he was almost stunned by a storm of curses and threats as the enraged parent fairly thrust him out of the house, vowing that he would a thousand times rather robe his child for the grave than array her for the bridal with one of the "Old Savage's" spawn!

"Eno, is that you?"

The young man gave a start as that soft, musical challenge came to his ears through the moonlight, and for a brief space he failed to realize whither his footsteps had carried him. All unwittingly he had returned to a secluded portion of the town where Enos Dunbar's residence stood, and before him—

"Weltha, my pet—"

With a half-sob, half-laugh, the maiden sunk into his eager arms.

"I've been waiting, oh, so long, Eno!" she murmured, shyly lifting her glorious blue eyes to his face, giving a little sigh of content as she felt his arms infolding her so lovingly.

"I didn't know—"

"Nor I, until too late to send you word that papa would be away. I do not know when he will be back; he rode off this afternoon toward Up-grade, without telling me aught, and so— isn't it awful, Eno!" with a shivering little sigh as she rested her gold-crowned head against his breast.

"That I have lost so many precious minutes—yes, little woman!"

"I meant—if papa was n't so harsh!"

"I am one of the Savages, remember, Weltha," with a touch of bitterness coming into his voice.

"You are—let me whisper, ever so softly, Eno," twining her fair arms about his neck and gently pulling his head down until her lips brushed his ear with the sweet continuation: "You are—the man I dearly love! I can only remember that, Eno!"

For the moment his gloom vanished, and he promptly rewarded the blushing maiden for her sweet confession. But even that could not last after the struggle he had undergone that same evening.

The fierce threats of his father would sing in his ears. Mingling with that came the bitter scorn expressed by Enos Dunbar when he dared to ask of him his daughter's hand in marriage.

With both parents—and men of their caliber, too—what was left for the lover? Only one bold course, if he could only make his loved one realize the whole truth.

"Little woman, you do love me?" he murmured, gazing intently into her face as it lay against his bosom.

"Would I be here, else, Eno?" reproachfully.

"I know, but by love I mean more than most girls are capable of understanding. Do you love me enough to trust men everything? To be guided wholly and solely by my advice?"

"Yes. You love me. You would not counsel me wrongly."

The answer came without hesitation, but still Eno found it no easy task to put his meaning into plain speech. And yet—what other course of action was there left open for them?

"Even if I— Weltha, could you abandon all else for my love? Could you leave your home, your father, and yet be content with me?"

"Your home shall be my home, your people my people," softly.

A short, harsh laugh broke from his lips involuntarily, for those words called up the vision of his fierce father and his fiercer threats.

"I have no home, no people, Weltha," he said, forcing himself to be calm. "Just as your father kicked me out when I went to beg for your hand, just so my father this night sent me away under his curse—or with worse than a curse!"

"For me—because you love me?" faltered the maiden.

"Because we love each other, dear," his arms tightening about the shivering form that strove to slip from his embrace. "I will tell you all that passed between us, word for word, in good time, little pet. Just now there is a point of still greater importance to be settled. Little woman, it has come down to this: we must act, or our love must perish!"

"I don't—you frighten me, Eno!" panted the maiden, faintly.

"Because the stake is so immense, I am frightened myself—frightened lest it kill your love, Weltha! Yet it must be told, and better now than later, perhaps," forcing down his emotions and speaking rapidly:

"Will you go with me, love? Will you leave here to become my wife, trusting to the future for winning forgiveness from your father who—"

"Who answers you thus—and thus, you skulking cur!" cried out a harsh, angry voice as a dark figure leaped closer to the startled lover.

And as he spoke thus, Enos Dunbar brought a lithe riding-whip down across the young man's shoulders, with all the force of his arm!

And the blow was repeated with vicious energy as Eno Savage turned toward him with a choking cry, the lash marking his white face.

CHAPTER VII.

A HANGING POSTPONED.

THE chief of the Mountain Gamecocks staggered like one who had been dealt a heavy blow, one hand flying up to his throat and tearing at the close folds of the sable cowl.

"What? Dead? Who's dead, you devil? Speak out, or I'll—"

"Fore the good Lawd I hain't lyin', boss!"

gasped the outlaw, instinctively throwing up an arm to shield his head as the chief strode toward him with that harsh, strained voice. "It's Boss Clay—an' I see'd the Silver Spider suckin' the blood o' him!"

Once more that magnificent figure shivered and seemed to shrink within itself, but then the chief rallied, crying out savagely:

"Show me where, you fool! Guard the rascals, a couple of you; the rest follow and help hunt down the fiend that— Lively, curse ye!"

Barely articulate the words, so intense was his agitation, and he forgot to complete his sentence as he stumbled against the fellow who had brought such strange tidings. The grip of a giant closed upon the shivering rascal's shoulder, then hurled him headlong into the shrubbery through which he had come floundering in the nick of time for Carl Rank and the man with the shells.

After their leader sprung the outlaws in hot haste, drawing their pistols as they did so, and for a single breath it seemed as though the prisoners would be left entirely to themselves in the excitement.

"Stiddy, Shawl-neck!" cried one of the masks, recovering his wits before the prisoners could fairly realize their chance. "It's you an' me fer guards, mind ye, pard!"

Another of the outlaws whirled at the edge of the bushes into which his mates had plunged, throwing his revolver to a level and covering Saul Sunday as a warning sound parted his lips. But the pilgrim sport had made no move toward escaping.

When he heard the chief bid Yellow Pile go for the ropes, Solemn Saul seemed to abandon all hopes of saving his neck from the noose. His half-reckless, half-coaxing banter was dropped for his original meek melancholy, and pocketing the shells and little joker, he twisted the silver band around and upward, closing his ingenious table, sighing heavily the while as though bidding its charms an eternal adieu.

"Don't blizzer—hangin's plenty bad 'nough fer one dose!" he quavered, shrinking from that grim muzzle and lifting an open palm in further deprecation. "Sufferin' grandpaw! I should remark!"

"Steady, as you were, then, or—" began the outlaw, harshly, only to break off abruptly and turn his eyes toward the point from whence arose a wild, hoarse cry of mingled rage and grief.

Even the captives recognized the voice of the Gamecock chief, and their eyes met briefly. Long enough for Carl Rank to see that Solemn Saul had lifted his metal-bound staff and was crouching for a mighty leap and blow for life!

"Heads down an' heels up, you!"

The words were addressed to the nearest outlaw, but they never reached his brain. The staff clove the air and fell with a loud crack across his crown, flattening him to the earth like one stricken by a lightning-bolt.

Carl Rank struck out at his immediate guard, causing him to stagger, but the stroke was partly avoided as the fellow turned swiftly at that warning sound, throwing up his pistol.

The weapon exploded, but its contents harmed nothing more than the nearest bush, for Solemn Saul repeated his blow with good effect.

"Legs is trumps, pardner, an' ef ye don't play 'em mighty lively right now, good-by wind!" spluttered the sport, turning and darting away through the night, calling back over his shoulder: "Scatter twenty ways ef ye kin, or—"

The rest was lost to hearing in the savage yells which came from the direction taken by the remainder of the outlaws, telling only too clearly that they had taken the alarm from that unfortunate shot.

"That means business right from the handle!" muttered Saul, as he prepared for a desperate burst. "Salt wouldn't save us now, but legs and wind may!"

For a few minutes longer he maintained the reckless pace he had set for himself at the outset, leaping over, dodging around or plunging through such obstacles as he found in his path, as best he might by that uncertain light.

Then he paused, holding his breath while straining his ears in eager listening.

He could catch angry cries and fierce oaths from the direction of the little glade. He could detect sounds that warned him of hot pursuit, yet he paused long enough to be certain some of the outlaws were following directly along his trail.

"Of course—I've made noise enough!" he muttered, as he struck sharply off to the right, but at a far more moderate pace than before. "Let's see if their noses are better than their eyes!"

As rapidly as possible without making too much noise, the sport picked his way through the rocks and shrubbery, slackening his pace rather than quickening it as the sounds of pursuit came nearer and louder. It required rare nerve for this, knowing as he must that recapture would be equivalent to certain death.

He came to a halt with his back to a crescent-shaped boulder that towered far above his head and cast his figure into dense shadow. The polished staff was silently balanced in his hands,

ready for use in case those human hounds were not thrown off the scent by his double.

"You're looking for a picnic, my gay cocks!" he grimly muttered, coolly noting the sounds of his foemen, now startlingly clear and nigh to hand. "If I had my tools, you'd find one, too!"

"He's hidin'—that's what!" came a coarse voice through the night. "Scatter an' hunt coaster, pards!"

"Scatter you!" snarled another, savagely. "He's doublin' his legs fer all that's out!"

"Blow 'em through ef ye ketch a glimpse!"

Only those three voices were caught by the man who stood within the crescent, but from the various sounds that followed he knew that at least one of the outlaws had veered aside upon the correct trail, either by chance or guided by instinct, since surely no eyes were keen enough to actually pick up a trail by that dim light, over such ground.

The staff silently went back until it rested against Solemn Saul's shoulder, ready for a crushing blow should the worst come to him then.

But not a sound came from him, not a motion further did he make, though the cowed figure came fairly into view, brushing past him almost within arm's length.

Without detecting the fugitive in the shade of the boulder, fortunately for the integrity of his own skull.

"You couldn't play wiser if you knew it all, my dear fellow!" mentally laughed the sport, as that shape faded out of sight. "I'm not fond of striking from cover, but when I *have* to do it, the kick of a mule isn't a patching!"

As he stood with head bowed, Saul Sunday could catch sounds of the search, coming from various directions, and he knew that the peril was by no means past. The chances were that these rascals were well acquainted with the country 'round about, and that they would guard each avenue of escape when once satisfied they had overrun their prey.

"If they're what I more than suspect: part of the gang I've come here to ferret out, they'll never let up while the ghost of a chance lingers. And yet—how could they suspect? I've made no slip. Unless it was in sticking to the shells, and I never thought they had been heard of on this side of the Range!"

For many minutes longer Saul kept his post near the crescent-shaped boulder, biding his time with a patience learned through years of training in the perilous school of a Wild West detective.

The sounds of the chase had long since died away. None of the Gamecocks came back on the trail they had overrun, nor did he hear anything of the burly fellow who had so closely escaped coming in actual contact with him while standing at bay.

"Haste makes a mighty sight of waste, they say, and I've got only one scalp to lose!" he grimly muttered. "Time enough. The night is still young."

At length he abandoned his station, crossing the trail of the outlaws at right-angles, picking his way through the night with every sense on the keen alert.

He felt fairly sure that some of the enemy would follow back that line when they grew certain they had passed by their prey, and in so doing they might easily strike the crescent rock.

"If only one at a time, I wouldn't care so mighty much, for I'd give a dollar to have a social talk with a Gamecock just about this hour o' the night!" he reflected. "I'd like to chat about—well, say the Silver Spider, for instance!"

For half an hour more the man with the shells picked his way through the tangled country, using his eyes and his wits to the best of his powers. He strode steadily to "locate" himself, and to decide in which direction lay the stage trail, but with poor success.

True, he knew to which side of the trail the outlaws had turned at first, but had they kept to it? While blinded by the sacks, the prisoners had been taken so many different directions, made so many sharp turns and crooks, that all idea of location had been speedily lost.

"I reckon I'll have to put in the night at it, or take a lay-off until the sun comes up to throw a little light on a mighty tangled puzzle!" he muttered, coming to a halt as he found his further passage in that direction barred by the perpendicular wall which had escaped his notice until he was fairly within the pocket.

Bending his ear, he listened long and intently.

Not a sound came to his hearing save those natural to a night in the wilderness. He might almost have thought himself the sole human being within those grim hills and defiles.

"Wonder how Carl Rank made out?" his busy brain continued, as he sought a fairly comfortable resting-place in the shadows, bracing his back against a rock, with his staff ready to his grip in case of need. "I gave him a chance, and he looked gritty enough to make the best of it. He'd fight hard, unless they jumped him unawares, and I've heard no racket of that sort."

"Agent, eh?" with a soft laugh that rose hardly above his breath. "That's his say-so, though it wouldn't be mine if I had to make a guess from the cut of his jib. Wonder if anybody has sent him a confidential note? Wonder if the biggest lead of those he mentioned back yon', isn't more alloy than pure metal?"

How much further in this direction his thoughts would have carried him if no interruption had come, it is impossible to say, but just then the keen ears of the detective caught the faint echo of a heavy footfall, much as though a man had tripped over a stub or a stone.

Without a sound to betray his own movements, Solemn Saul rose to his feet, his shape blending with the shadows, until only the closest inspection could have distinguished him from the vine-draped rocks.

As yet he could see nothing new, but he could note each lagging footfall that told him a human being was approaching his refuge.

"Too mighty lazy for Rank," he mentally decided, gripping his polished staff firmly, poising himself for a leap should the fellow come within favorable range. "Wonder if he knows what I want to find out?"

Just then a dim figure came within range of his vision, pausing almost directly in front of the crouching fugitive to grumble:

"The devil's own luck, sure! But let them bear the brunt that made the first slip, and I'll show up only when the chief has drank his fill from their veins—poor devils!"

He turned half around as though to seek a more comfortable retreat, but before he could increase his distance, Saul Sunday leaped out from the shadows and closed with him.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MERCIFUL LITTLE JOKER.

"GIVE a crow loud as a peep, an' my gaffs go clean through the boller o' ye!"

Sharp, yet not loudly came the threat as Saul Sunday caught the outlaw about the throat with one arm, "shutting off his wind" as neatly as though he had practiced garroting for ages. A bony knee dug into the back of the surprised rascal and a strong arm bent him over, to twist him to the ground with a shock that effectually disabled him for the time being.

Holding the fellow face down to the ground, sitting astride his body and pinning an arm with each knee, Solemn Saul worked swiftly to make good his capture.

With the fellow's own knife he slit the heavy leather belt taken from his person, making stout thongs with which he deftly bound both wrists behind his back. And then, appropriating the knife and brace of revolvers to his own use, the Sad Man from San Saba rolled his captive over on his back, grimly muttering:

"Open the trap o' ye, critter, an' I'll make ye swaller eight inches o' butcher-knife!"

"Mercy—don't!" gasped the half-stunned wretch, unable as yet to fully realize the peril of speech.

A bony set of fingers closed about his throat, effectually checking further pleading, and their mates shivered the keen blade before those starting eyeballs.

"Simmer—you! I never was fond o' stickin' hogs, but I kin do it ef I hev to."

There came no reply, of course, for that fierce grip forbade; but by instantly relaxing his strained muscles, the fellow made known his unconditional surrender.

"That's white as you kin git, mebbe, critter," laughed Saul, sweeping his keen gaze around the spot to guard against surprise in case the rascal should have comrades nigh. "How many is they of ye? Was you promenadin' all to your own self, or—wink how many pards, critter!"

The eyes stared unwinkingly and the outlaw shook his head slightly. As plainly as he could he proclaimed himself alone.

"Most times I'd read your no fer a mighty loud yes, critter," nodded his captor, slackening his grip, though without entirely removing his fingers. "But jest now you're so pizen skeered that I do reckon you've told the clean truth when ye didn't know it."

"I have—alone—"

"Waal, I'll make ye think you've tumbled right into the middle o' a mighty full rijimint, pardner," chuckled Solemn Saul as he removed his weight from the other's person, lifting him to his feet and steadying him thus for a brief space. "When you git the feel o' yer footin', pardner, jest chirp an' I'll hear ye. But peep mighty small, mind ye!"

"What are you going to do with me?" huskily muttered the man.

"Make ye take a solemn davy to never ag'in tree the wrong 'coon, fer one thing; or ef ye do, to let him go, pelt an' all," laughed the man with the shells, stooping to secure the sable cowl which had been shaken from the outlaw's head when he was hurled to the ground.

"It was the chief—"

The rascal bit his words short, seemingly annoyed at having so far committed himself, but Sunday dangled the mask before his eyes.

"Talkin' cain't hurt ye, critter, though mebbe

it kin ease up a bit on your punishment. You're Duck-wing, ain't ye?"

There came no reply, and by the light of the moon Sunday could see his harsh features sullenly settling themselves into doggedness.

"Tuck with a mighty sudden shortness o' breath, ain't ye, critter? Couldn't peep out a crow ef a hull brood o' strange cocks jumped your walk an' scratched a wing round your fattest pullet? Mountin', mebbe? Got the pu? Army, I shouldn't wonder? Or is it the yall-ers?"

Still no response. The sulky rascal cast a swift though covert glance around, as though meditating a desperate dash for liberty, bound though his hands were behind his back.

"Play ye didn't don't, Duck-wing," quietly added Sunday, flashing the bright blade across his cheek, sending a chill running over his burly figure by the contact. "I'm the mildest chicken that ever jumped out of a bag, but they's some things that cain't help ruffin' my frill. One thing is a fool fer the lack o' sense. 'Nother is a critter that don't know how to 'preciate good comp'ny when he tumbles into it by chance. So—eyes right, an' foller yer nose, Duck-wing!"

With bony fingers gripping his neck and a keen point pricking his back, what could the outlaw do but blindly obey?

Past the little pocket mouth he was forced, into its narrowing recesses until the rock wall checked their further progress.

"Right about face—squat!" commanded Sunday, a foot and hand combining to drop his captive more abruptly than ceremoniously to the flinty soil in a sitting position, with his back braced against the wall. "Good a heap plenty, critter! Ef I hed the train' of ye fer a stiddy month or so, I'd turn ye out fitten to move in the highest succles o' skim-milk—I jest would, now!"

"It's your turn now. Make the most of it while you can."

"I most gin'ally do, thank ye all the same fer the permission. But afore I fergit it, who is your chief?"

"Ask him that question when next you run up against him!"

"I'd rather ax you, Ducky."

"I don't know."

"Then of course you cain't tell," placidly nodded Sunday. "Good boy fer not tryin' to choke me off on a lie. I'll keep it in mind when we come to settle up. Nur I don't reckon you could tell your own name an' nash'nality, nuther?"

"Never had a name, and lost my pedigree before it was made out."

"I want to know! Funny things will happen, won't they? Sech as hevin' a wheen o' critters take one pore critter fer 'nother critter—an' so on."

"If you're not Solemn Saul Sunday, then you're his ghost!"

"I'm him, dead sure—wuss luck!" with an abrupt return to his old melancholy snuffle. "Wish't I wasn't! Wish't I'd died a-bornin' or been changed at nuss! Wish't—look right in the two eyes o' me, stranger, leavin' out all jokes an' slurs," he added, earnestly, leaning forward and slowly wagging a bony finger before the eyes of his captive as he spoke deliberately:

"You an' four mates played dirt all over me this night. You drug me in the dust with a laryit. You went through my kicks, an' never left me a copper to run up ag'inst the outside of a s'loon. You stole my dunk—though I'm 'bleeged to ye fer that much!"

"You skeered me out o' seven year' growth 'long o' your durned ole rope an' your tree an' your talk o' pullin' raw hemp. An' you went so fur's to hint that mebbe I hedn't sense 'nough fer to know my own name an' nash'nality. An' wu'st of all, you 'lowed that I was a durned measly 'tective!"

"I could overlook the rest, but *that*—that hit me too mighty hard! Me—who come from the Lone Star State! Me—who hate law an' all itsimps wuss then p'izen! I cain't climb over that so easy!"

"Yet you say you are Saul Sunday—and he is a detective!"

"His ghost is—the feller that looks like me is, mebbe. An' that's why I hate 'em all so eeternally. I've bin kicked out o' town after camp. I've hed a bushel o' cold lead slung 'round my cabeza ontel I wanted a glass ter see ef I didn't tote a bee-gum fer a head, the buzzin' was so powerful like! I've hed—but whar's the use o' talkin'?" breaking off with a doleful sigh.

"If it's all a mistake, I'm free to apologize for my share in it," slowly said Duck-wing, drooping his heavy lids to conceal the red glow in his evil eyes.

Solemn Saul leaned forward and lightly brushed the tips of his fingers over the bearded face of his captive, laughing softly as he drew back again.

"Ef I didn't know better by tetch, critter, I'd doubt ef you hed any sech thing as cheek 'bout ye!"

"I've got teeth enough to make up for that lack, Saul Sunday!" the outlaw snarled, viciously. "Maybe you'll recognize *them* by touch, one of these days!"

"My train p'int's up, yours is mighty nigh

ready fer to pull out fer down grade. They don't give return tickets on that line, Duck-wing, an' you cain't fly so fur with scorched wing-feathers."

"You mean to butcher me, then?"

"Waal, not to say jest-butcher, as I knows on," slowly drawled the man with the shells, thoughtfully smoothing his goat-like beard as he gazed reflectively into those sullen eyes. "As a rule, I'm mild as skim milk, but when I'm kicked too hard, it's kinder nat'ral to give a shy back the same way. An' yit—though you all wouldn't listen to me when I begged fer a weenty chaine fer my last stake, I'll set a better 'zample!"

Diving a hand into his pocket, he produced his shells and the little joker, smoothing out one leg to serve as a make-shift table, stringing the shells and going through with his performance with bland nimbleness.

"Tain't nickels, dimes, an' dollars this time, pardner, but body, boots and britches! Win ef ye want to live, lose ef ye want to skip over the range by the light o' the silver moon! Onkiver the little joker, an' shout glory to the lamb! Slip up on it, an' sing your weenty prayer fer a eeternal sleep—ef the fires ain't poked up too mighty hot fer snoozin'."

"Over an' under, top an' bottom, rights an' lefts—here she goes, an' thar she goes! Whar's the weenty little joker, pardner?"

With sullenly glowing eyes the helpless rascal watched those nimble fingers, trying to keep track of the deftly flying pea, but in vain, and with a snarling oath, lay back, awaiting his fate.

"Ye cain't win ef ye don't bet, pardner, an' you're bound to lose ef ye don't make a try fer it," encouragingly said Solemn Saul. "Who knows? They do say the Old Boy stan's by his own, an' ef they's any truth in the proverb, why do you skeer so shy?"

"Because you're only playing with me, just as the chief played with you—curses on his head for giving you so much rope!"

"I'll tell him you don't 'prove o' his doin's, next time we meet, Duck-wing," blandly nodded the oracle of the thimbles. "But the game is waitin', pardner, an' the little joker is gittin' mighty sleepy. Ef you don't onkiver him mighty soon, shouldn't wonder a bit ef he was to crawl off an' go to bed whar you could never find him. Sometimes he's jest that spunky! Others—one o' which is now, I'm open to bet odds ef anybody'll lend me a stake—he's jest as sure fer to be under the winnin' shell, as a egg is full of meat when it ain't too ripe. An' so—"

"Turn up the shell on the left, then!" growled the prisoner.

Solemn Saul obeyed, revealing the black ball in the moonlight.

"Waal, waal, ef that don't git me 'way up!" he murmured, in a tone of puzzled amazement. "An' me a-takin' the oath o' me inside that the contrary critter was snorin' under the middle bull."

"Then you'll turn me loose?" asked the outlaw, with poorly suppressed eagerness. "It isn't all a bitter jest?"

"The little joker will hev it that way, an' I ain't goin' fer to go back on a squar' offer!" sighed the man of sorrows, putting up his implements. "But afore I sign the pardon, Duck-wing, let me whisper a few plain words into them two ears o' yours."

"I've writ down each line o' that face o' yours into a mem'ry that don't know how to fergit. You wouldn't tell me who your chief was, nor how I could find him fer to even up that way."

"All right! I'll know you ef we don't meet up 'long o' each other fer a cent'ry. An' ef any o' your gang, chief or cockerel, game or dung-hill, takes 'nother fly at my back, I'll hunt you up, an' wipe out the score with your life! That's recorded in red letters, Duck-wing!"

CHAPTER IX. THE SILVER SPIDER.

HALF crazed with the dread of what awaited him, the chief of the Rocky Mountain Gamecocks fairly lifted Yellow Pile clear of his feet and hurled him headlong into the shrubbery through which he had come floundering with that startling cry:

"The Silver Spider!"

"I can't—I won't—where are you, Clay?"

He was hardly conscious that words were passing his lips; certainly he did not know what shape the syllables took.

"Thar—by the hosses!" ejaculated the outlaw who had been the means of making the discovery. "Jest so—jest like that I found 'im when—Good Lawd!"

His teeth fell to chattering like castanets. He stretched out one arm to point, but his finger went astray because his eyes would not turn toward that dread object.

Beyond the shrubbery lay another space comparatively smooth and free from brush, the clear moonlight falling across the opening, outlining the horses belonging to those night-riders, glancing back from boss and buckle, showing each detail with marvelous clearness in that pure, rare atmosphere.

And there, lying a little to one side, so near a small patch of stunted trees and brush that the dark shadow cut off all save head and shoulders, was the latest victim of that terrible mystery, the Silver Spider.

If the motionless figure now lying there had really belonged to the gang of outlaws, he had discarded or been robbed of the disguising cowl, possibly by the hand that sprung the fangs of the Silver Slayer.

With head bare, save for the silken masses of yellow hair that lay in a tangled cloud about it. With face turned up toward the star-gemmed vault of heaven. With widely staring eyes that saw naught, though a look of unutterable horror was painted upon their filmy surface.

Thus he lay, and thus the chief beheld his younger brother!

The sight seemed to petrify his limbs, checking his blind rush, holding him bound as by a spell long enough to note all this—and even more!

To catch the moonlight as its beams glinted aside from a rudely polished surface, in relief against the bearded cheek turned toward him; small in size, but only too readily recognized by one who had gazed upon its like before.

This it was that wrung from his lips the wild, inarticulate roar through which Solemn Saul and Carl Rank were enabled to make their desperate break for life and liberty.

"The Spider—Clay, my brother!" hoarsely panted the chief as he broke that benumbing spell and staggered forward, to drop on his knees beside that motionless figure.

It showed plainer, now, that devilish contrivance.

"Don't—don't tetch it, boss!" panted Yellow Pile, fidelity to his master seeming to lend him double courage for the moment. "Mebbe the p'izen thing kin bite both ways! Mebbe—Holy smoke!"

The chief was reaching out a hand as though to pluck that death-spider from its last victim, but it was not wholly that sight Yellow Pile bestowed his sharp ejaculation upon.

A pistol-shot, blending with an angry, alarming cry came from the point where the two captives had been so hurriedly left under a slender guard.

Even in his terrible grief, the outlaw chief could rightly interpret these sounds, and the emergency seemed to restore his usual nerve.

"After them, you hounds!" he roared, leaping to his feet and waving a clinched hand toward the point from whence that alarm had come. "Go fetch—dead if you must, but fetch!"

"Not all—not everybody, boss?" and Yellow Pile shivered as he cast a timorous glance around them. "Mebbe it's a scheme—mebbe the p'izen critter wants to run us off fer to—to tote away—"

"You three stay, the rest—off with you, devils!"

A nod indicated the chosen trio. A fierce sweep of his arm sent all others tearing away on the hot trail of the fugitives.

"Shell we—think it's any use fer to hunt a trail, boss?" ventured Yellow Pile as the chief turned once more toward the silent figure lying half in shade, half in moonshine.

For answer he tore the sable disguise from his head and cast it to the ground, bending back his head until his bared brow turned up to the heavens.

It almost seemed as though the victim of the Death Spider had revived sufficiently to gain his feet, for the face of one was the face of the other; dead and alive, two in one.

There was the same wealth of yellow hair, long, slightly curling at the ends, marvelously fine and silken for the sterner sex; the same large eyes, blue as the summer skies when the light of day showed their true color; the same strong, yet handsome features; and now the face of the living was fully as white, fully as ghastly as that of the dead.

A gloved hand clutched at his throat as though to tear away the obstruction that was suffocating him, but that weakness lasted only a few moments.

"A trail? Whose? The trail of the Silver Spider? Isn't that plain enough?" and he pointed at the metal death-messenger as it lay in relief against the cheek of his brother.

As though forgetting his men, his recent prisoners, everything save his dead, Boyd Savage sunk to his knees once more at the side of his brother, shaking off the glove that guarded his right hand and placing a finger-tip on the little lump of rudely-fashioned silver.

A shiver crept over his massive frame at the touch; cold as death it felt.

Yellow Pile was watching with dilated eyes, and as he noted that shudder, he crept nearer, his tones broken and quavering:

"Don't, boss! What'll come o' us ef ye both go?"

"Never fear for me, Dad," spoke the chief, glancing over his shoulder for an instant, the tinsel-drawn lines of his face softening for that space. "This devilish contrivance has performed its mission. Have you forgotten? There is one for each of us! One for each, and this—dollars to cents it bears the figure three!"

Boyd Savage—his name may be given, since

he himself cast off all disguise for the time being—steadily plucked the metal from the flesh, though its curved claws seemed to cling viciously to its prey. He looked at them for a brief space, then gave a pressure that caused them to slip back into the bean-like body.

"The same!" he muttered, barely above his breath. "The same hand fashioned it. The same hand must have applied it, too! But how? Why wasn't Clay on his guard? Why didn't he give a challenge? Why not—if he had uttered even a single cry, I must have heard it!"

He shivered afresh as he glanced from the Death Spider down at the stalwart figure of his younger brother. A figure only a shade less gigantic than his own. The figure of a strong, active man, capable of giving any foeman a tough fight for life. And yet he must have fallen without even a cry for help!

"It can't be—I can't believe it!" panted Savage, rising to his feet, still gripping that fatal insect between thumb and forefinger. "He isn't dead—he's only—Dad!"

"Right hyar, boss!"

"Start a fire. There's a blur to this infernal moonlight that fools my eyes. Lively, curse ye all!"

Before he ceased speaking the quartette were at work gathering dry leaves and twigs and heavier material for the fire. A match was struck and a bright blaze swiftly sprung into being, growing stronger and clearer until the moonlight was paled by its ruddy glow.

Boyd Savage bent closer to its flames, holding the Silver Spider so that the light was reflected from its imperfectly-polished back.

In the center was carved the figure 3. On the left side was cut the letter W, and opposite, to the right of the figure 3, stood a rude letter Y.

The spider itself was of bullion, some two inches long by two-thirds as much in width and one-third in thickness at the center, tapering down at the edges. There was a rounded projection at one end, doubtless to represent a head, but the poisoned legs were no longer visible, being sheathed inside the hollowed body.

"I knew it!" cries Savage, as he deciphered those rough carvings. "This is the third time I've seen the cursed thing. This is the third brother I've lost by its claws! Wonder—whose will be marked number four?"

"Mebbe 'tain't—mebbe Boss Clay won't quite—" feebly began Yellow Pile, only to be cut short by his chief.

"You saw the others, I think, Dad Filkins. You helped to bury at least one of them. Was there any chance to restore either? Then—but try what you can. I'd kick the cover off my coffin if the boys couldn't take so much trouble on my account!"

Both his tone and manner changed abruptly and completely. All weakness, all emotion such as a brother might be supposed to feel and betray over the corpse of a murdered relative, vanished from that moment. He was once more the cold, harsh, imperious chief of the Gamecocks, whose slightest nod was a command.

Yellow Pile nodded to his mates, and together they lifted the massive figure of Clay Savage, bearing it nearer to the fire, both for its warmth and its clearer light.

Boyd Savage stood near, his arms folded over his broad chest, his strong face showing no emotion, though even that ruddy glow could not lend a touch of color to his blanched skin.

He had hidden the Silver Spider somewhere about his person, apparently giving no thought to the danger he might thus be running; for if those poisoned claws were worked by simple pressure, any abrupt movement on his part might well send them curving out to sap away his life, just as they had stilled the heart of his counterpart lying so cold and unresponsive to the touch of the outlaws.

Shawl-neck and the other guard who had gone down before the stout staff of Solemn Saul, came skulking into the second opening, dazed and abashed, more than half expecting a pistol-shot as the sole question to be asked them by their chief. But if he saw, Boyd Savage gave them not the slightest notice.

"Ef he don't ax, we won't talk, pard!" huskily mumbled Shawl-neck. "Mebbe he don't know it was us that stayed behind fer to look out!"

Almost from the first touch, the outlaws knew that Clay Savage was long past their aid, but as the chief gave no sign, they kept up their work, rubbing and chafing and essaying to bring back life through artificial respiration.

Yellow Pile lifted his eyes hurriedly as a sound told him the chief was changing his position, but still no word was spoken. Boyd Savage paused a few feet from his former position, cold and silent as before, only his arms now hung lower, his right hand resting on the heavy metal haft of his bowie-knife.

This change seemed purely mechanical, yet there was a deadly purpose to be carried out by it. For, a moment later, that heavy blade came out, to be hurled with vicious force into the foliage up the rocks!

CHAPTER X.

A DANGEROUS INSTINCT.

WHEN he saw their two guards go down be-

fore those sweeping strokes of Saul Sunday, Carl Rank paused only long enough to snatch up the smoking revolver dropped by the outlaw, then sprung away from that dangerous spot at the top of his speed.

Like the man with the shells, he had only the faintest idea as to how far or in what direction lay the stage trail in which they had been captured, and like Saul Sunday he never gave that even a passing thought for the time being.

The prime essential just then was to place as great a distance between himself and those yelling, cursing ruffians, as he could manage.

"One thing, you hounds!" he grated as he bent to his work, plying a remarkably nimble pair of legs, leaping, dodging, twisting here and there as the nature of the ground he was covering rendered necessary. "You'll have to do something besides talking when you nail me again!"

There had been no time to select a course, and Carl Rank simply rushed away in the direction toward which his face chanced to be turned at the moment, but this seemed a stroke of fortune for him, since nearly all of the outlaws followed along the track taken by Sunday.

Although neither of the fugitives could be sure of that fact, Saul had taken the most direct route to the stage road, which accounts for his being pressed so much more closely.

Carl Rank put his legs to good use for the first few minutes, running as only one can run who feels that his life rests on his speed. And cool though his brain was, he lacked the shrewd wit that stood Saul Sunday in such good stead.

If he had given more thought to caution than to speed, it is probable that he might have got clear without even a single enemy looking in that direction, but that reflection came too late. At least one keen pair of ears caught the sound of his hasty flight, and a sharp yell brought still others that way.

"Yelp on, ye curs!" muttered the fugitive, maintaining his killing efforts with a success that spoke well for his physical condition. "All who come so brash won't go back the same way if you crowd me too close!"

After those first cries, telling him the enemy had struck his trail, Carl Rank heard nothing from them. He ran on through the night, twisting and turning now to the right, now to the left, as forced to do by obstacles which he could not leap or climb without losing too much precious time. He paused only when his breath began to fail him, and then but to bend his ears in acute listening.

Not a sound. All was still. Unless the enemy were running mute and soft shod, he must have thrown them off the track or distanced them completely.

"All right!" he muttered grimly, sinking down under the shade cast by a scrubby brush, keeping his eyes fixed on the narrow pass through which he had gained that spot. "I've got five cartridges in the gun; heap more than I've breath to spare, just now! If you're running by scent, so much the worse for the gang. I'll risk a wait, and try to make it interesting for all who come up before I get my second wind."

Minute after minute passed by without bringing to his listening ears the sounds he expected, and then he began to feel fairly confident that he had indeed escaped.

"If I knew where the road was! And yet—would I rather find that than to win a secret peep at the cause of all that racket?"

His eyes began to glow as he recalled that strange reprieve. What did the fellow mean? What was the Silver Spider? And who was "Boss Clay?"

"Dollars to cents they're the prime cause of my taking this trip!" flashed through his busy brain as he sat waiting. "If not the head center, that chief is connected with the gang I heard of, or I've lost my powers of reasoning. And—poor devil!" with a short, dry laugh as he recalled the Sad Man from San Saba. "Little more and he would have worn my collar—would have choked for one of the tectives he rails so hotly against, while I—well, reckon I'd have hung for being caught in bad company."

"All of which goes to prove—what? That my confidential note wasn't all wind. That if the terrible villains of which said note spoke, are not in existence, others are, quite as well worth investigating. That this chief is one. That he must have got wind of my coming, though how that happened is more than I can figure out just now!"

A frown crept over his strong face at this disagreeable reflection, for he knew that if the fear was founded on fact, his mission would be rendered ten-fold more difficult and dangerous.

"All the same, old fellow, I'll rake you in or you'll pull down my number for good and all!" he muttered, as he rose to his feet and gazed intently around him, trying to locate himself and decide which course would be the best for him to follow.

This indecision did not last long, though he had hardly the ghost of an idea left as to the actual points of the compass, nor in which direction lay the little opening from which he had darted away so hastily. As for the stage road, that was a still greater enigma.

"I'd make money by hunting a hole and bunking in for the rest of the night, maybe," he murmured, as he struck out through the rocky waste once more. "Dollars to cents I wear out shoe-leather for nothing better than stiff muscles and sore heels. Yet—if I could jump on to the necktie of one of those black hoods! He'd have to squeal, or I've lost the art of pinching a crook. It might save a powerful sight of piping. Wonder if it isn't in the wood?"

The strange instinct which seems innate to all who follow the thief-taking profession for long, was reviving in this man who had denied being more than a simple business agent. Already he was longing for what he had spent his strength to avoid but a short time before: a meeting with at least one of the sable cowed Gamecocks.

With his captured pistol held ready for use in case he should be the surprised instead of surpriser, Carl Rank pressed forward, keeping as nearly as he could judge in the general direction of his headlong flight. This was little better than guesswork, however, since he had been forced to take so many crooks and turns that he had lost all certainty on that point.

As he proceeded, he kept his eyes and ears both keenly alert, bent on reaping some benefit from that night's adventures if possible. He was resolved to capture one of the Gamecocks, provided he could chance across one without too many mates hard by.

"If I do—well, he'll have mighty few feathers left on him if he holds out against my pinching!"

This hope, however, began to grow faint and very unsubstantial. Forgetting how much more rapidly he had come than he was going, Carl Rank was about to conclude that he had thoroughly befogged himself and must be adding to instead of decreasing the space between himself and his recent captors, when he caught sight of a faint red ray flashing up against the face of a rock some little distance ahead.

"A fire, by mighty!" he breathed, crouching suddenly down under cover of the nearest bush, his eyes glowing.

If a fire—and though he had caught but a passing glimpse of the ray, he knew it was too red for a shaft of moonlight—the hands of an enemy must have kindled it. If an enemy, had his incautious footsteps reached their ears?

Even the bravest man does not like to think that an enemy may be taking deliberate aim at his heart or brain while securely hidden from view, safe against a return blow, and though there was a strong spice of the bull-dog in this hunter of evil men, his flesh seemed to creep and crawl as he crouched under cover, sweeping his dark eyes around in quest of that foeman—if foeman there was.

Neither shot nor blow came, however, and his suspended breath came back as he caught a distant sound: that of an iron-shod hoof stamping sharply on the ground.

"My nag, or one of the gang's?"

No further sound came to his listening ears, and he cautiously rose erect, looking for the tell-tale light. It was gone, but he had the correct course lined out, and that was all he asked for just then.

"That horse was hitched mighty nigh the rock, or the echo fooled me, bad," he reflected, stealing forward as silently as a red warrior on the trail of a coveted scalp. "Guard yourselves, Gamecocks, for I'm hot on the scent and I mean business, pure and simple!"

Before he had covered a score of yards, another red shaft shot up against the rocky slope, and sufficed to plainly locate his game, let that prove what it might. And with this point settled, Carl Rank paused long enough to note his surroundings.

He saw that he now occupied ground something higher than the spot where that blaze must have been kindled, for while he could look ahead to the rocks from which that red ray was reflected, without lifting his eyes above their normal level, he could see nothing of either fire or of those who had kindled it.

"Down in a bit of a hollow, I reckon," was his decision. "That's plenty good enough for me. They'll not be so apt to catch sight of my classic phiz when I steal a squint at their doings."

Crouching lower and taking every precaution against making a sound loud enough to betray his progress, the detective crept forward, silently removing each dry leaf and scattered twig with his unaimed hand before venturing on. And as he came closer to the fringe of bushes which he felt certain must alone hide the enemy from his eager eyes, he redoubled his caution, if that was possible.

Through the foliage and gnarled branches he could catch a glimpse of the fire shining redly, and more than once he caught sight of a human shape through the obstruction, though never clearly enough to satisfy his burning curiosity.

Moving along the outer edge of the bushes, Carl Rank at length reached a point where he believed he could effect his purpose best, and lying flat on his stomach he wormed his way through the bushes toward the edge of rock partly overhanging the little glade where the fire was kindled.

"Eureka!" he mentally exclaimed, as he caught plainer sight of the chief and his Gamecocks. "Bareheaded, or I'm a liar! If he'd only turn his face this way for one instant!"

His keen eyes instantly recognized the tall, athletic figure of the leader, though that sable cowl was gone. The light shone through the edges of yellow hair, showing its color plainly enough, but not a glimpse could he catch of the chief's face.

Not until satisfied on this point did Carl Rank look at anything else. When he did, it was almost impossible to smother the cry of surprise that sprung to his throat; indeed, he was by no means certain that he had entirely smothered the dangerous sound, though nothing in the manner of his enemies below indicated that it had reached their ears.

Lying stretched along the ground, with face and figure fairly revealed by the blazing fagots, was the perfect image of the chief!

"Twin brother, for ducats! If the face only matches as well as the body, I'll know you the next time we meet, mighty chieftain!"

Interesting as he found that vision, Carl Rank gazed upon it no longer, for just then Boyd Savage leisurely passed around the fire to the other side of the corpse, thus fully exposing his own face to the greedy eyes of the detective crouching amid the bushes.

"Twins go! I'll know you, my—"

The thought was never completed, for with a motion swift as light, Boyd Savage drew his knife and hurled it straight at the face which he dimly saw framed among the bushes!

And before Carl Rank could fairly realize his peril, something seemed to split his skull in twain, and his body came tumbling end over end down the rocks.

CHAPTER XI.

WHICH IS THE COWARD.

NOT a single warning sound had come to the ears of the lovers, and the first intimation either had of discovery by the person whom they had, just then, strongest reasons to dread, came in the shape of that cruel slash of riding-whip, wielded by a muscular arm, doubly nerved by hatred and chagrin.

"You skulking cur! You cowardly sneak! Wouldn't a civil warning satisfy you? Then—"

Half blinded by the second blow, which crossed his face and seemed to lay his flesh open to the bone, Enos Savage staggered back with a choking cry, instinctively lifting an arm to guard his head.

"Father—don't!" gasped Weltha, shrinking away, yet appealingly stretching out her arms. "Papa—Eno—"

"I'll cut your hide to ribbons and tan it for shoestrings, you whimpering cur!" raged the elder man as he followed up his advantage, striking swift and viciously, aiming his blows at the head and face of the youth who had dared aspire to the hand of his child and heir.

"Father—you shall not!" cried Weltha, forgetting her own fears in her devoted love for this object of a cruel revenge.

She sprung forward to interpose her own frail form, but with a single sweep of his free arm, Enos Dunbar hurled her aside to fall at full length with a sharp cry of mingled pain and despair.

It was not a blow, though Enos Dunbar was too fiercely excited just then to measure his own strength. All he meant was to brush the child aside lest she prevent him from completing his well-begun punishment of this impudent rascal; but the poor girl fell as if stricken by a heavy fist, and that indistinct sight wrung the first sound from the lips of her lover.

"You've hurt—killed her, brute!" he gasped, leaping straight at the throat of the father, gripping him madly and bearing him backward, to trip and fall with a stunning force to the ground.

"I'll have your—"

So far Dunbar raged, but then the shock fairly drove the breath out of his lungs, Savage adding his own weight to the fall.

There was a confused struggle for a single breath. Dunbar was partly stunned, but he fought blindly to free himself from that deadly grip as it tightened upon his throat.

Then Eno Savage secured his advantage, sitting astride his assailant, pinning an arm to the ground with each knee. One hand was sinking its fingers deep into the flesh of the elder man's throat. The other was plucking an ugly blade from the hidden sheath at the back of his own neck.

"Father—Eno—don't murder—"

Dizzy, stunned, sick at heart, the poor girl partly recovered from that heavy fall, lifting her head to catch a glimpse of the two men in what bade fair to prove a death-grapple before her.

A pitiful, broken prayer, but it was sufficient to save the life of her father and to keep the stain of murder from the hands of her young lover.

Already that deadly weapon was flashing upward in the moonlight. Another second, and it would have fallen, once for all.

"Weltha—you live?" panted Eno, dropping his steel, and turning as though to spring to her side.

Enos Dunbar, catching his breath as that fierce grip fell away from his throat, desperately sought to fling off his antagonist and regain the advantage which he had lost so unexpectedly.

He was wild, mad, burning with a fierce, deadly hatred, or he would have played a subtler part by waiting until the youth had lost the upper hand entirely. As it was, he defeated his own ends.

"Will you?" sternly muttered Savage, thrusting his head back and pinioning his arms once more. "Lie still, or I'll kill you yet!"

"Let up—coward!" chokingly gasped the elder man, struggling as fiercely as that hampered position would permit.

"Weltha, little woman?" called out Eno, turning his head once more toward his loved one. "You are not hurt? Speak to me, darling!"

"Not hurt—only dizzy, and—don't—"

She tried to advance, but that awful dizziness overcame her, and only by leaning against the fence could she save herself from falling to the ground.

Eno Savage believed, and justly, that nothing more serious than fright was ailing her. That thought banished his worst fears, but it only served to increase the mad shame which caused his face to burn as though bathed in liquid fire.

His eyes fell upon the knife which lay by his side, and his fingers quickly closed upon the hilt, bringing the weapon with its keen point almost touching the skin between the bulging eyes of his furious adversary.

"Shall I, Enos Dunbar?" he gratingly hissed. "Shall I drive it home? Shall I give thrust for blow?"

His fingers relaxed sufficiently to permit the older man to catch breath, and there came a husky defiance:

"Coward! kill me or I'll kill you!"

Eno Savage laughed; hard and vicious the sound.

"You say coward? Who crept up like a snake to strike from the shadow? Who dealt his first blow from behind, thinking and trying to blind a man so that your own carcass would be safe from a stroke? Ay! you do well to talk of cowardice in another!"

"Eno—spare him—for my sake!" brokenly cried the poor girl, leaving her support only to sink to her knees at her second step.

"For your sweet sake—"

Dunbar also caught that appeal, for he suddenly resumed his struggles with such desperate energy that Savage had to drop his knife and make use of both hands in order to retain his supremacy. And as she dimly saw those twain—the two beings whom she loved above all the world else—so fiercely fighting, Weltha seemed paralyzed.

In vain she tried to cry out, to lift her voice in a shriek which might reach other ears and bring aid to save them both: one from death and the other from manslaughter.

Not a sound came from her parted lips. She could only dimly watch that terrible sight, feeling as though death alone could bring her relief.

The struggle was far too desperate to last long, and heavily handicapped as he was, Enos Dunbar soon lay limp and helpless beneath the man whom he had lashed like a cur.

"For your sake, Weltha," panted Eno, turning his head and giving the assurance which the father had cut short before. "I'll not harm him—further than reading him a lecture on—steady, Mr. Dunbar!" his tones changing swiftly as his assailant gave evidence of returning consciousness.

Once more the young man gripped his knife and sent a ray of moonlight glancing from its polished blade into those wild eyes.

"You called me a coward. You crept up and attacked me from behind without the slightest warning. You forfeited your life by that craven act, and not a soul in all the city but would cheer me for slitting your throat in return. Shall I do it?"

His left hand was no longer on the throat of his enemy, and only the weakness following that last desperate struggle fettered the tongue of Enos Dunbar. That, or new-born fear, perhaps.

He had met hot rage with the like, feeling the more reckless for the fierceness shown him, but this cold, measured tone awed him.

"You treated me as you might a cur caught in the act of robbing your sheepfold. I bear the marks of your lash across my face, and if I fail to cover that brand of shame in the only way possible to do so, all men will jeer at the—coward!"

Up flashed the gleaming blade—down it shot as though bent on an errand of death. To be checked by a deft hand just as its keen point pricked the skin between those quailing eyes.

"If I was the coward you called me, Enos Dunbar, that would be my answer to your vile epithet. If I were a coward, I'd sink this bit of steel to its hilt in your heart or brain, and thus wipe out the stain you have cast upon my manhood. As it is—look!"

With a deliberate motion he cast the weapon far away through the night. With another, he drew a heavy-bore derringer from his bosom and flung it from him.

"You see?" he added, coldly. "I have thrown my weapons aside. If you could accept the word of a coward, I'd swear to you that I carry no other arms than those nature gave me at birth."

"Let me up!" hoarsely muttered Dunbar.

"That you may show me how a brave, honorable gentleman should act? All right, Mr. Dunbar: you shall have your will!"

Eno Savage rose to his feet, extending a hand in silent aid to the man whose lash had so cruelly marked his pale face.

If seen, the hand was not accepted. Slowly and doggedly Dunbar rose to his feet, shaking the dust from his garments and smoothing out his crushed hat before replacing it on his head.

With hands clasped behind his back, Eno Savage stood before the older man, his own graceful figure drawn lightly erect, his face very pale save where a blood-red welt crossed it diagonally. And when he spoke again, his tones were as even as they were cold:

"I think I have proved to you that if a coward, I can at least defend myself on equal terms, Mr. Dunbar."

"Go your way—I'll kill you if you don't!" muttered the other, his voice hoarse with deadly passions.

"You might. There would be little danger in shooting down a coward whom your own eyes have seen disarmed."

"Find them—I ask no odds!"

"A coward has no right to carry manly weapons, Mr. Dunbar, and my hands shall touch neither gun nor knife from this night forward. Only for a word from the lips of your daughter—"

"Stop!" and the father drew back a menacing fist. "Mention her name and I'll crush you as I would a carrion-fly!"

"It is your fault if the name of Miss Dunbar be brought forward this night, Mr. Dunbar," steadily facing that enraged man, his hands kept tightly clasped behind his back, the better to resist temptation. "It is your fault that we are obliged to meet in this clandestine manner, for you forbade me the house—"

"Say I kicked you out for your impudence!"

"Consider it said, if it gives you comfort, Mr. Dunbar," was the cold response. "However I may have left your house, you cannot deny that I entered it after a manly fashion. I frankly sought your presence to ask permission to wed your daughter."

"And I told you I'd rather bury her alive than see her join hands with one of the Savages—black blood from top to bottom!"

"And I told you, what I now deliberately repeat: as long as Weltha Dunbar honors me with her love, just so long shall I cherish the glad hope of one day making her my wife!"

Enos Dunbar stooped and snatched up the whip which had fallen from his grasp when the lover leaped at his throat. Gripping it firmly he caused the tough rawhide to hissing cut the air between them, then harshly cried:

"Go, you rascal! Get out of my sight and hearing, or I'll finish the job begun a bit ago—I'll turn you out a perfect zebra! Stripes belong to the Savage family, anyway!"

"Strike, and we'll leave the world to judge which is the cowardly cur, you or I, Enos Dunbar," coldly uttered the young man. "As for your daughter, sir, I'll have her yet, in spite of your teeth!"

A grating oath came from the lips of the father at this calm defiance, and he struck one blow—to have the whip wrenched from his hand and tossed far away into the shadows.

"Catch this, then!" he cried, as he drew and leveled a revolver full at the breast of his antagonist.

CHAPTER XII.

LOVE IS LORD OF ALL.

THE effort which it took to jerk away that whip and cast it into the night, turned Eno Savage part way around, and though he quickly recovered himself, Enos Dunbar staggered back a pace or two before he steadied himself and drew his pistol.

Thus the two men were separated by several feet, and active as he might have shown himself, the young man could hardly have escaped the death which Dunbar fully intended bestowing.

But the end was not to come after that fashion, and even as the rage-crazed father leveled his deadly weapon, the daughter sprung forward and struck his hand down, sending the bullet harmlessly into the earth.

"Father—my love!"

With a sobbing cry, Weltha left the first and sprung into the arms of the second, burying her face in his bosom as her fingers locked about his neck.

"My love! he must kill me first!"

"Hold your hand, madman!" sharply cried Savage, as he saw Dunbar lifting his smoking weapon once more. "Wait until—My darling, go!"

With a force caused by pure fear for her, his idolized one, Eno tore those clinging arms from his neck and thrust her aside, facing Dunbar and sternly adding:

"Shoot, and brand yourself the coward you dared to call me! Man to man with empty

hands I proved myself the better. When I held your life at my fingers' end I gave you quarter. I threw away my weapons and faced you with hands locked behind my back. And you—which one of us twain has acted the coward this night, Enos Dunbar?"

Before the man so sharply addressed could reply, Weltha Dunbar once more sprung between, this time facing her father with white face but blazing eyes, all signs of physical weakness vanishing.

"Father, hold your hand; touch him not; stain your manhood no blacker! Blame me for this meeting, if blame be deserved—but it is not! I love him. He loves me. I have promised to be his wife when—"

"When I am dead, not before!" harshly cried the father, striding forward and gripping her arm with almost brutal force.

"Don't, Eno!" hastily cried the maiden as her lover started forward. "If you love me, go away now!"

"If he promises not to harm you instead—"

"He will not—I am safe, darling! Go—and take my undying love with you!"

"I will go, since you command me, love, but—if harm comes to you for this, not even his being your parent can save him from my vengeance. You hear, Mr. Dunbar? A coward warns you for the last time!"

There came no reply to this quick speech, and though it was very hard to turn away and leave his loved one in such harsh hands, Eno Savage felt that it was better so, for her sake.

Though that was a comparatively secluded portion of the town, he knew there was danger that the pistol-shot might bring curious people in that direction, and, above all, idle gossip must not cause her ears to tingle with shame.

Enos Dunbar made no move to check his retreat, though his blood-shot eyes followed him sullenly.

Now that his mad attempt at murder had been frustrated, his senses began to come back to him, and a shiver ran through his compact figure as he thought of what might have been, only for the heroic action of his daughter.

"I'm glad—glad he's able to walk off like that, Weltha!" he said, his tones anything but steady, as he slipped the pistol into his pocket. "I didn't really mean to shoot the rascal! I was mad—his taunts drove me fairly wild! I didn't realize what I was doing!"

"Don't speak of it, father, for I can't bear much more," faintly murmured the poor girl, clinging to his hand as her brain grew dizzy once more. "Home—take me home!"

Enos Dunbar caught her sinking form in his arms, and bore her rapidly away, entering the yard surrounding their house, entering the building, and placing his daughter upon a lounge therein.

"I'll call Patsy—"

"No, I'm better—I'm quite well, father!" hurriedly interposed Weltha, checking Dunbar as he was on the point of summoning their housekeeper—a fat, comfortable old negress, who had by some strange fate, wandered over the range to P. M. City.

Enos Dunbar was only too willing, now that he saw his child was recovering from her fright.

His garments were disordered, torn, covered with dust, and he knew that his face must likewise betray signs of the desperate struggle he had so recently undergone.

Then, too, he began to feel thoroughly ashamed of the part he had played in that unfortunate adventure, for he was by no means an ordinary ruffian, however strongly past events might point in that direction. And already he was trying to shape an apology which might win the maiden over to his side, and insure her complete silence.

"You'll forget, and forgive, little woman?" he asked, wetting his parched lips with the tip of his tongue, as he anxiously gazed into her pale, haggard face. "I was mad for the time being. I didn't know what I was doing. And—you know how I warned you against meeting or having anything more to do with that—"

"I love him, father!" interposed the maiden, lifting a hand, while twin spots of rich color leaped into her cheeks.

"You think so now, because you haven't had full time to realize his utter worthlessness, little woman," hastily frowned Dunbar, choosing his words most unluckily, as he felt the instant they had crossed his lips.

"If the town had seen and heard all that passed this night, which man would they feel most like pronouncing worthy, father?"

"Are you bent on driving me distracted, child?"

"Better mad than a—Father?" slowly uttered the girl, her face once more more white as snow. "Did you really mean to—shoot him?"

"I tell you I was beside myself, silly girl!" flashed Dunbar, his brows contracting and his tones growing harsher. "You'll make me sorry I didn't kill the skulking cur if you go on after this fashion!"

"Father, isn't it time for you to try and realize that I am a little child no longer?" asked Weltha, sitting up and gazing calmly, steadily

into his passion-flushed face. "Do you know I am nearly nineteen years of age?"

"Have you discovered a gray hair while admiring your pretty face in the glass, Weltha?" he laughed, with assumed lightness.

"I have discovered something of far greater importance, father," unconscious of the pang which that changed title gave him; he had so seldom been called other than the more childish 'papa.' "I have found the only man in all this world whom I could ever marry!"

"You are dreaming, child! Time enough for that when you've seen more of the world—curse the fond weakness that led me to send for you to this God-forsaken hole!"

"That is past mending, father. You did send for me. I came very gladly, for where should a daughter be but by the side of her father?"

"Where, indeed?" eagerly catching at the chance. "I ask no greater blessing than to have you ever by my side, little woman, at least until you find one fully worthy to take my place, as your husband."

"I have found him, father!" was the quick cry, her glorious eyes filling with a softened light that told how intensely she loved. "And unless he makes me his wife, no other man shall claim that title! Why do you hate him so bitterly, papa?"

"I can give better reasons for my hatred than you can find to excuse the foolish fancy you dignify by the name of love, child. I hate him, first and foremost, because he has cast an almost fatal spell over my child—all that is left me to love and cherish in this hard world!"

"And I love him—because I can't help it, papa."

"I hate him because of his evil kin, his black, treacherous blood. You know what they are; these Savages! You know they have proved themselves a curse to the town ever since they first struck it. You know they are professional blacklegs. You know they run the worst gambling hell and saloon this side of the Range. And if you don't know, I'll tell you now: they are more than suspected of being still worse; they are said to be head and front of the murderous gang called the Mountain Gamecocks!"

"Not Eno—not the man I love, father!" proudly uttered the maiden, her cheeks richly suffused, her glorious eyes flashing with mingled pride and anger. "Not even you shall accuse him wrongfully to my face without meeting reproof!"

"This to your father, girl?"

"You are my father, or still harder words might pass my lips, sir," came the spirited retort. "I might bring up your own words; I might recall what you told me, long ago, but—"

"You've said enough already, and lest you make me say too much, we'll drop the subject once for all."

"When I have told you yet a little more, father," was the grave, earnest amendment. "Father, I am a woman now. I am quite old enough to know my own mind and heart. I love Eno Savage as a woman can only love the man she hopes to marry."

"You never shall! I'll kill him first!"

"As you came so near doing but a short time ago?" a ringing impressiveness entering her voice as she added: "One more such attempt, father, would drive me into his arms without further warning! I never knew how intensely a woman could love another until I saw him—unarmed, his hands held behind his back to resist temptation—facing your cruel whip—the whip that marked his dear face so barbarously."

"And—Heaven help me!" as she bowed her face in her trembling hands, the words coming unsteadily: "Father, I almost—I came perilously near to hating you then."

"I wish I'd killed the whelp!" flashed Dunbar, springing to his feet and angrily pacing the floor. "I'll lash him out of town so sure as the sun rises in the morning!"

"If you do—father!" lifting her head and looking him firmly in the face, the tears drying in her eyes like magic. "If you try to do that, sir, I'll go with him! I'll bear him company, if only to save your life—no, no! I don't mean that! Eno would never strike my father, for he loves—loves me!"

Her voice choked and the tears came rushing into her eyes again. She rose hastily and moved toward the door, pausing with a hand on the knob, to brokenly pronounce:

"Forgive me if I have been too sharp, father. I hardly know what I may have said. That scene—I am weak and sick at heart. But—as high Heaven hears me, father, I'll never marry any other man than Eno Savage!"

Without waiting to receive a reply, Weltha opened the door and left the room. She brushed the blinding tears from her eyes and passed up the stairs, never seeing or hearing Patsy, who was coming to learn if the master had had supper.

Entering her own chamber, Weltha flung herself on the bed without striking a light or making any preparations for retiring. Heavy sobs shook her graceful frame, and she gave herself over to unrestrained grief.

It was all so hard, so shameful, so bitter!

She had seen him lashed like a cur—the man

whom she loved so tenderly, yet so passionately. She had seen that cruel mark across his pale face—a brand applied by the hand of her father. And he had borne it all—for her sake!

"God bless him for that!" she sobbed. "I could hardly have blamed him if he had—but his hands are white, his soul is unstained—my love, my prince, my—husband that shall be!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RITE OF THE DEATH SPIDER.

END over end, Carl Rank rolled down the rocky slope, losing his way just before his carcass reached the little fire beside which lay the figure of Clay Savage, the third and latest victim of what was called the Silver Slayer.

With a ring and a clink the heavy knife came after, checked when part way down the rocks, glittering in the ruddy glow.

With a quick bound Boyd Savage regained his weapon, uttering a snarling sound as he looked at its point, for the blade was bright and unsullied as when it had left its sheath.

His bared hand gripping the haft with vicious energy, Boyd Savage turned back and bent over the fallen figure for a single breath, then rose erect and cast a fiery glance up the slope to where the luckless spy had been taking notes.

"Say the word, boss!" hastily cried Yellow Pile, first to recover from the surprise that had sent himself and mates recoiling from the side of their leader's brother. "Shell we—Any more up thar?"

"I'm not looking for more—only wondering why that fool caught the wrong end of my knife. I see, now!" grimly muttered the chief, as his keen eyes solved the mystery.

Unfortunately for Carl Rank, he had not entirely smothered the cry that sought utterance when he began to realize the magnitude of his latest discovery, though Boyd Savage gave no outward signs of having taken the alarm. Such was the fact, however, and it was to borrow the use of his eyes that the chief of the Gamecocks so carelessly changed his position, even at the cost of fairly exposing his own face to the sight of the eavesdropper above.

Through his heavy eyebrows the chief managed to catch a dim glimpse of that white face as it was thrust further forward to make perfect its view, but he dared not wait for a better sight, lest this daring spy escape as those others had.

A swift and deadly hand with the knife, he preferred that weapon to making use of his pistol, for he could cast by instinct, and it took a fraction of time for even a snap-shot.

His aim was true enough, for it brought down his game, but thanks to the weapon striking a stout branch which crossed in front of Carl Rank's face, the heavy handle whirled over and simply stunned instead of splitting the detective's skull.

"He's the one we tracked—rest o' the boys is a'ter t'other!" cried Shawl-neck, fancying he saw a chance to save himself and mate at least in a measure.

Boyd Savage flashed an ugly glance toward the two fellows, but said nothing, for just then Carl Rank gave a husky gasp and feebly endeavored to pick himself up.

"Your kiver, boss!" hurriedly muttered Yellow Pile, holding up the cowl which he had snatched up from the ground. "Don't let that pizen critter glimp' the bar' face o' ye, fer—"

"I reckon he's photographed it on his brain, Dad," grimly laughed the chief, though he took the disguise and deftly placed it in position once more. "Still, I hardly think he'll ever tell the world at large what lies behind this hood."

"Then—you 'low to—"

"What—who hit me?"

Carl Rank lifted the upper portion of his person, supporting it by one arm, his other hand mechanically brushing the blood from his eyes as they stared dizzily about him.

"You were struck by lightning, Detective Carl Rank, and by all rights you ought to be growing cold and stiff," mocked the chief of the Gamecocks. "You ought to be dead. You are dead. Lie down and act more like a decent corpse—can't you?"

Carl Rank stared stupidly at the cowed speaker until that mocking voice died away. Then he began to realize the awful truth, and with a sharp cry he leaped to his feet in faint hopes that even yet his speed might save him. Only to stagger as one leg failed him. Only to go down beneath Yellow Pile as that rascal leaped at his throat.

"Shell I, boss? Shell I shet his wind fer—"

"Not all at once, Dad, please," laughed Savage, shaking his head in negation. "Give the poor devil a chance to make amends. I'm almost certain he came back this way to tell me something he forgot when we had our little chat, over yonder."

"Tain't fer me to chip when the likes o' you says pass, boss," the outlaw mumbled, reluctantly releasing his captive and rising to his feet. "Nur I wouldn't chirp a whimper ef I didn't think the critter hed ketched a glimp' o' the face o' ye when—"

"I meant a respite, not a pardon, Dad," laughed the chief as a wave of the hand set his other fellows to work binding the crippled de-

tective. "Do you think I'd let him go free, after that?"

Yellow Pile shivered perceptibly as he followed the motion of his chief's hand.

"You don't—kin he be the devil that done it, boss?"

"Only for him it couldn't have happened this night, at any rate! Only for the hint we had of his coming—his or that of the whining fraud who kept him company—would we have been here! Curse the evil luck that led poor Clay to elect himself horse-guard!"

His tones grew husky, and Boyd Savage turned sharply away, to hide his emotion from even this, his most trusted and confidential follower.

Yellow Pile softly crept nearer until he could gently touch an arm. And cruel though the words were, his tones were soft, almost musical when he spoke again:

"Eye fer eye ef you say the word, boss! Turn the pizen critter over to me, an' I'll go bail he shain't never peep a word o' what's bin goin' on under his eyes this night!"

Boyd Savage gave a perceptible start, one hand mechanically rising to touch the pocket into which he had slipped the Silver Spider. The terms chosen by Yellow Pile, whether intentionally or not, recalled that hideous contrivance to his mind.

"You mean—this, Dad?"

The outlaw visibly recoiled as his master held forth the lump of metal, so simple in its appearance, so terrible to the sight of all who had witnessed the result of its touch.

"I didn't think—why not, boss?" recovering himself, and his eyes glowing vividly through the apertures in his mask. "Eye fer eye an' tooth fer tooth! Ef he didn't work the pizen critter with his own hand, he giv' the chainece fer it to ketch Boss Clay! An' so—ef you say the word, boss, I'll give the spider 'nother bite!"

His hand was stretched out to take the silver bug, but Boyd Savage drew it back, slipping it into a pocket. Then he strode over to where his men had dragged Carl Rank to a stunted tree, binding him to its trunk in an erect position.

"What were you doing up yonder, Carl Rank?"

"I'm a stranger to this region, sir, and while trying to find my way back to the stage-trail, I caught a glimpse of your fire. I hoped it came from a friendly camp, but before I could catch even a single look, you knocked me over."

"How long were you up there watching us?"

"Not more than a second or two, at most."

"That will do, Carl Rank," sternly nodded the chief. "If you lie in one thing, you'll lie in all. I heard you full half a minute before I moved to the other side of the fire. I stood there as much longer before I could fairly locate you. And during all that time you were taking notes?"

"Of what?" boldly demanded the prisoner. "All I had thoughts for when I saw that I had blundered back into your company, was how I could crawl away without being heard and jumped upon."

"Mebbe yes an' mebbe no, boss," muttered Yellow Pile from where he stood at his chief's elbow. "But, all the same, he see'd the face o' you 'bout any kiverin' over it!"

"I'll take any oath you see fit to dictate—"

"And break it while laughing at our folly in trusting a professional bloodsucker to scorn!" flashed the chief, viciously.

"I tell you I'm not that!" with dogged persistence, though he must have seen how vain were his hopes of thus winning his escape from death. "You as good as admitted as much when you fastened on that other—Saul Sunday, you called him."

"All right. You are no detective. But, you are a man with two keen eyes in your head. Those eyes have rested on my bare face. They have taken note of yonder—of my dead brother. That's heap too much news for any outsider to carry away with him. So—what have you to say, Gamecocks?"

"Shet off his wind!" cried Shawl-neck, and his sanguinary verdict was promptly indorsed by his mates, while Yellow Pile spoke eagerly:

"'Twas 'long o' our foolin' with him that Boss Clay got bit by the Silver Stinger chief! Eye fer eye, an' I'm the man to make it come true! We never see how the bug does its work, with the own eyes o' us, but what's the matter with doin' o' it now? What's the matter with makin' that figger on the spider tell a lie?"

Brave man and strong nerved though he had often proved himself, Carl Rank gave a little cry of fear at this fiercely significant speech. Though he had never heard of the Silver Slayer before that night, and had never even caught a glimpse of the fiendish invention, he could see a specimen of its work still lying beside the fire, and the mere thought of dying thus sent a cold shiver creeping over him.

"Look!" laughed Yellow Pile, noting that tremor. "Do ye ax any better sign then that? Jest the thought makes his marrer melt in the bones o' him!"

"You lie, you dog!" flashed the doomed detective. "It's not death, but torture I feared. Now—do your worst, and see how a man can

laugh your devilish arts to scorn, even in death!"

Springing forward, Yellow Pile rudely tore the clothes from his bosom, his harsh laugh breaking off abruptly as he felt something more than cloth beneath his fingers.

Carl Rank made a desperate effort to burst his bonds, but failing he stood grimly silent. His face was ghastly white, but his square jaws were rigidly set. He knew that his last hope was gone as the outlaw tore a hidden paper from his vest, passing it over to Boyd Savage after a single hasty glance.

"I can't read by moonlight, boss, but mebbe you kin make out what the dockymint hes to say."

"Do you still deny that you are a detective, Carl Rank?" demanded the chief, after swiftly mastering the few lines.

"Go on with your rat killing, curse you!" was the dogged retort. "I deny nothing. I say nothing save this: if there's any coming back across the death-range, I'll haunt you all until the gallows ends your crimes forever!"

"What's the word, chief?" quietly asked Yellow Pile, reaching out a hand in anticipation of the answer.

"Death, of course," came coldly from those cowed lips as their owner brought forth the Silver Spider and touched the cunning spring which caused the poisoned claws to leap forth.

The Gamecocks shrunk back in superstitious awe, but Yellow Pile never flinched. He reached out a hand for the destroyer, seemingly ready and even eager to act as executioner.

Pressing back the claws, Boyd Savage relinquished the venomous instrument of death, and carefully picking it up from that gloved palm, Yellow Pile turned once more to the doomed detective, baring his breast and locating his heart.

"I'll return from the grave to haunt—" The horrible thing touched his flesh. The claws leaped out and pierced the skin. Then—

A frightful shudder agitated the frame of the detective for a single instant—then his head drooped, his muscles relaxed.

Lightning itself could not have worked more instantaneously!

CHAPTER XIV.

IN AN UNHALLOWED GRAVE.

EVEN Yellow Pile seemed to yield to the frightful fascination which took full possession of all the others.

Breathless, they stared at the doomed detective long after the hideous work of that deadly mechanism was complete.

It was so sudden, so different from what they had fancied it would be, that they stood looking and wondering, waiting for something more, unable for many moments to realize that the dread work was done!

"Good Lawd!" ejaculated Yellow Pile, breaking the oppressive silence with a long-drawn breath. "Is that all? I reckoned—"

Boyd Savage strode forward, lifting the drooping head by placing a hand under the chin, gazing keenly into those staring eyes. Then he turned away with a slight shiver.

"It's enough—the fellow is dead!"

"Then—ef 'twasn't jest fer the name o' the thing, I wouldn't mind goin' that same way when my time comes!" ejaculated Yellow Pile, removing his cowl and wiping his brow with a hand that, despite his bold words, trembled perceptibly.

Boyd Savage turned away to the fire, dropping on his knees beside the corpse of his brother. Not to pray, not to gaze into that ghastly pale face, but to hurriedly trace a few words with pencil on the back of the document found by the old Gamecock.

Rising to his feet, he called out sharply:

"Anderson, take this paper and give it to the old gentleman. Ride as if the devil was reaching for you! Into the hand of Ambrose Savage, mind you. If any other sees it, I'll serve you worse than Dad served the bloodhound yonder!"

The Gamecock addressed took the note and hastened to where their horses stood hitched. Releasing one of these, he leaped into the saddle and sped away through the night at breakneck speed.

"Dad, cut that carrion loose and prepare it for packing on a horse," added the chief, as his messenger departed. "The rest of you bring up the horses. Our work here is done, and the rest—"

"Boss?" almost timidly uttered the old outlaw.

"What is it, Dad?"

"Him," with a jerk of his head toward the detective. "Ef you tote him to town, who's to say they won't be trouble over the way he come like that?"

"I'm not thinking of taking him to town. I'm going to carry Clay to the Den, and he can make the same trip."

"Fer why? Beg pardon fer chippin' in so durned brash, boss, but ef they's any rumpus kicked up over his fadin' out o' sight—an' they' mighty apt to be, when one o' his sort loses hisself, ye know!"

"Ye think?"

"That ef he's hunted fer an' found, better be

hyar then up yander nigh to what we've all swore tough to keep secret, boss!"

Boyd Savage stared at the limp figure by the tree, held from sinking down in a nerveless heap only by his bonds. He gave a little start as a breaking brand sent a red ray flashing across that Death Spider.

"You're right, old fellow, as you always are. Take off that devilish killer, and plant him where you see fit!"

"Wouldn't it be best to leave the durned thing right whar it is, boss? An' then—ef the p'izen critter that 'vented it should be the one to find him fu'st—mebbe he'll come back to see what we've done with his number three!"

"Anything—do as you like!" hoarsely muttered the other, turning away with unsteady steps. "God! I'm sick—sick as death!"

Yellow Pile sighed audibly as he saw this, but he ventured no word. He knew that his chief meant heart-sickness. Grim, evil, crime-stained though he was, Boyd Savage loved his brothers even better than he did himself, and none of them so well as he had the one who looked so marvelously like himself, even as he lay cold and silent yonder.

"Ef the 'Venger wanted double sweetness reckon he'd find it sloppin' all over jest watchin' you! It's bitin' you heap deeper than the spider bit Boss Clay!"

In silence Yellow Pile helped prepare Clay Savage for the ride through the night, seemingly trying to express his hearty sympathy with his suffering chief by actions rather than words.

Few of these were spoken until all was in readiness. The body was bound as tenderly as possible in a saddle. Boyd Savage took the halter-strap in his hand as he mounted his own steed, saying:

"You know what to do, Dad. Keep Mike Jimpsey to help you, and when all is smoothed over, make your way back to town and wait for further orders."

"Then we ain't to come to the Den?"

"No. Go home, and act so that no one'll suspect you've been afoot this night."

"An' ef any o' the boys should come back with that gangling critter they're layin' out fer?"

"If they show up before you finish, send them with their game to me. I'm hoping they'll save all trouble by dropping him in his tracks, though now I've found him," with a short nod toward the detective, "I begin to think the fellow was square enough in his yarn."

Yellow Pile had no further questions to ask, and Boyd Savage rode off through the night with his ghastly companion.

"It's you an' me fer it, Jimpsey," nodded Filkins, as the little horseman faded away from sight. "Tain't so mighty 'greeable trade, but mebbe we kin boggle through with it after a fashion."

"Av I had a spade in me fist it isn't the howl'd be after daantin' me, d'ye moind, Daddy, dear," mumbled the Irishman, scratching his head as well as he could without removing his disguise. "Bud—is't sure yez air the spalpeen isn't—ow-wow!"

With a muffled howl he leaped backward, half-turning in flight, glaring over his shoulder at the detective bound to the tree.

"What's bit ye now, ye durned bog-trotter?" angrily demanded Dad Filkins, catching the fellow by an arm and roughly jerking him around.

"Av I didn't—didn't I thin, Daddy dear?"

"Didn't ye what?"

"Sure, Daddy dear, I ketched 'im winkin' the eye av 'im at us!"

With a harsh, contemptuous laugh Yellow Pile strode up to the tree and raised the head of his victim.

"Winkin', ye crazy critter? Winkin' is it? Dead as a doornail! Up with ye an' take a squar' squint fer yerself."

"Sure, Daddy dear, I'll take the word o' ye foar ahl that!"

"Sure, I'll tell the boss you played soger an' wouldn't help me kerry out his orders; an' you'd ought to know what that means!"

"Av he is did—av I wor sure he w'u'dn't—"

Yellow Pile harshly repeated his command, and Jimpsey dared not refuse. He crept closer, his eyes staring widely, but in the end he grew satisfied that the detective was indeed dead.

"Sure it isn't a did mon that kin skeer Moike Jimpsey d'ye moind, now; bud a did mon that winks loike a loive wan—ow-wow!"

"Stop yer clapper an' fall to work, will ye?" growled Filkins, busying himself by replacing the garments over that hideous symbol of death, leaving it with its poisoned claws buried in the flesh above that silent heart. "Pick out as soft a place as ye know how. Not fer his comfort, but fer our own, ye mind!"

Leaving their victim still bound to the tree for the time being, Dad Filkins passed over to where the two horses still stood, soon returning with a gray blanket which he spread out on the ground. Cutting the bonds which alone held what remained of Carl Rank erect, he lowered his body to the blanket, rolling it over and over until the hapless being was snugly covered up.

This accomplished, Yellow Pile lent his aid

to digging the rude pit which was intended to cover their victim from human sight.

"D'ye know, Daddy dear, I'm sthilla ahl av a shiver whin I luk back at the way ye bit that spoider—ugh!"

"You're not the first that's fell to shiverin' over that same p'izen critter, Jimpsey," grimly replied Filkins, but without slackening his labors.

"What does it m'ane, annyhow, honey?" coaxingly asked the Irishman, giving free vent to his burning curiosity. "Who makes thim divils? An' who? An'—"

"Find out who makes 'em, Jimpsey, an' I reckon you could sell your knowledge fer a pile o' ducats higher then ye could jump over, limber as ye brag o' the two legs o' ye!"

"To the boss, d'ye m'ane, mebbe?"

"Keep a-workin', durn ye fer a shirk! Scratch gravel the best way ye know how, an' to keep yer finger goin' I'll tell ye all I know 'bout the p'izen critters; which isn't nigh the hafe o' what I'd like it was!"

"Ye see how I found the young boss, didn't ye? Waal, that same way—leastwise it was jest as stone dead—two own brothers o' him bes bin diskivered sence the Silver Spider was fu'st heard of."

"D'ye moind that, now!" ejaculated the Irishman, his voice full of superstitious awe. "Ow-wow! It's Moike Jimpsey w'u'd h'apes rather be him own sel', bag o' bones though that same, thin iver a wan o' the big boss chafes, av ye ain't stoofin' me wid—hoist, Daddy, dear?"

"Cross the heart o' me, Mike," grimly nodded Filkins. "Three times now hev I see'd that awful sight! T'hee times—an' thar's three more to come, leavin' out the Kid!"

"Whoy not him, thin? Sure, isn't he wan o' the same fam'ly?"

"Hafe-way, no more. Hafe-way by blood, an' not a durn bit by natur', ef that's what brung on the cuss. Mebbe he'll go the same way, ef we cain't ketch the p'izen critter in time. I'm keepin' the eyes o' me mighty wide open, but so fur I hain't ketched even a glimmer o' hope. The critter comes an' goes an' never leaves the smell of a trail behind him. So—what show hes ary common man ag'inst sech?"

For some time the two men dug on in silence, each one plainly deep buried in thought, Jimpsey was the first one to speak, and as he did so his voice was full of mingled fear and awe:

"Daddy, dear?"

"Out with it, Mike!"

"W'u'd ye be thinkin'—av it moight be—devil burn the thick tongue av me, anyhow! Is thim bloody spoiders goin' to take to boitin' the rist av us? Av so—sure, boss or no boss, oath or no oath, pay or no pay, it's Moike Jimpsey, that's bound for to make the biggest, longest l'ape av his loife!"

"You're goin' to skip, Mike?"

"Sure an' I will, jist!"

"Don't ye do it, pard," grimly nodded Filkins.

"Don't ye even go fer to think that way when 'nother critter is nigh ye. I'll keep mum, but mebbe you wouldn't al'ays be so lucky. An' ef ye was to try it on—waa! spiders wouldn't begin to be a tit on a hog 'longside the pay you'd ketch from the gang—mind that, now!"

"Divil a woorse thin that spoider, anyhow!"

"That spider'll never tackle the likes o' us. It's made only fer the old man an' his boys. I know so much, sure."

This confident assurance seemed to pacify the frightened outlaw, and the two men worked on in silence, rapidly deepening the pit, thanks to the loose sand which lay under the thin crust of earth.

When the hole was considered deep enough, the two men turned to where the body lay wrapped in its blanket. With one at the head and the other at the feet, the body was carried to its unhalloved grave.

Wild, reckless, crime-hardened though they were, the outlaws handled the body with respectful care, lowering it into a pit and breaking a few leafy limbs to cover it over before casting it into the loose sand.

The work was quickly accomplished, the top being smoothed over, the extra sand and grave being scattered about to guard against easy detection.

Then they stamped out the fire, mounted their horses and rode off, leaving the ill-fated detective in his unhalloved grave.

CHAPTER XV.

SAUL SUNDAY RECEIVES A SHOCK.

SOLEMN SAUL saw his captive shiver a little as he listened to that deliberate vow, and the sight pleased him far more than would the most fluent of protestations.

"It's mighty tough—saddling me with others' sins, don't you think, stranger?" muttered the fellow in limbo.

"Ain't you a mighty tough citizen, Duck-wing? Ain't you flung up the hat o' ye, an' gloried in that repetition all over, many's the time an' plenty over, when you was filled to the neck with benzine, an' jest honin' fer some rooster to try and cut the comb o' ye? An' that's why the mighty toughness fits all over ye right now, honey."

"Lucky, too, fer I've got your mem'ry pinned

down mighty tight, Duck-wing. Reckon I'd know ye ef 'e was to meet up in the 'clipse o' the moon. An' you're the lonesome one o' the hull outfit that I do know—see?"

"All right. I'll make the best of it, reckon. Now turn me loose!"

Solemn Saul bent forward, and gingerly felt of the outlaw's arms and shoulders, wagging his head sorrowfully, as his bony fingers next measured his own biceps.

"Bigger then two o' me all hunched up together, Ducksy! More muscle an' presarved ginger than the hull Sunday famby could begin to scare up, ef they was plentier'n weekdays! Ef you was to make a fergit yerself, an' was to bump up ag'inst the back o' me, an' was to sinch them piston-rods 'round my b'iler—good gethunder!"

Duck-wing drooped back against the rock, a savage oath rumbling in his throat, as he felt that through all he had been but played with by this glib-tongued scarecrow.

"Now you're callin' me a liar into the stomick of ye, critter, jest beca'se I don't up an' slap ye loose, fer to git kicked both ends up," gravely reproved the pilgrim sport, shaking a finger before the sullen face of his captive. "Did I say I would? Wasn't it throwin' the shells to see ef I was to kill ye afore skinnin', or peel off yer hide without any more botheration?"

"You lie, curse you!" snarled Duck-wing. "You said you'd give me a chance for my life!"

"An' didn't I? Ain't ye still a-livin', an' breathin', an' kickin'—spec'ly kickin'? Think I 'lowed to hire a brass band, an' pick a ring o' posies to crown ye with? Reckon I 'tended fer to git down on the hunkers o' me, an' play burro to keep from growin' corns on the two heels o' ye?"

"I didn't calculate on being talked to death, anyway!"

Saul Sunday grinned good-naturedly at this broad insinuation, and evidently he thought there must be some foundation for the hint. At any rate, he dropped his discursive style, talking sharp and to the point.

"That's one on me, Duck-wing, an' now—business!"

"I'm goin' to let you run until the rope ketches ye, fer me; but at the same time I ain't durnd fool 'nough to set ye free to jump on the back o' me as soon's I turn it that way. Stan' up. Face the wall. Stiddy—an' try to keep in mind that I'll jab this sticker clean through ye at the fu'st crooked move!"

Aided by a strong hand, Duck-wing quickly followed orders, though it was plain that he by no means relished the situation. Still, open resistance was out of the question, and when he felt the leather thong leave his wrists, and that keen pointed blade prick his spine, he sullenly resisted the temptation to make a daring break for freedom and revenge.

With the knife Saul Sunday ruthlessly slit Duck-wing's coat from top to bottom, removing it part at a time and deftly twisting it into tough strips suitable for his purpose.

This done, he forced the sullen rascal to resume his former position with back against the wall, deftly binding his hands before him, tying his legs at both knees and ankles, ending up by forcing a gag between his jaws, knotting the ends firmly behind his head.

"Jest to keep ye from cussin' too mighty loud while ye onfasten them trotters, Ducksy," he blandly explained, cocking his head on one side and complacently viewing his work. "You kin do it ef ye hev patience long enough. I reckon you'll be fit to travel by the time the sun crawls out o' bed in the mornin', an' by that hour, Lord willin', I'll be too fur off to ketch a chokin' when ye fill the air full o' sulphur an' brimstone!"

Picking up his staff and securing the weapons which he had confiscated as lawful prizes, Sunday bade his fuming adversary a bland farewell, then struck out through the night.

"Wiser, maybe, to have shut off his wind for all time, but that was just a drop too near bloody murder, even for a man of my profession!" he reflected, as he paused to cast a puzzled look about him, striving in vain to recognize some clew to the stage road. "He'll be hot enough to bounce me at first sight, warning or no warning, but if I've locked his jaws long enough to let me find a way out of this conglomeration of rocks and pits, hills and chuck-holes, I reckon my hands can guard my head."

This was the first time Saul Sunday had passed over to that side of the Divide as a professional, and for the time being he felt almost as helpless as the veriest tenderfoot. He was lost, and he knew it. He knew that while seeking to find his way out of that puzzling labyrinth, he ran great risks of blundering into the hands of some of the Gamecocks who were still searching for their lost prey.

"But that don't count. They'll be wider-eyed by day, and if they are as deeply in earnest as I think their boss was, they'll have every pass guarded too close for a live man to steal through. So—hit or miss, legs do your duty!"

Under the circumstances it is hardly to be wondered at that, even with the full moon as a

partial guide, Solemn Saul should go still further astray. In the first place he started wrong for his hopes of speedily reaching the road which led to P. M. City. In the next, when he became doubtful on that score, he was too stubborn to yield.

"This'll bring me out somewhere, if I stick to it long enough, and that's all any fool has a right to expect or hope for!" he doggedly muttered, pressing on with legs that seemed tireless.

He contrived to keep to the same general direction, despite the many obstacles which barred his way and forced him to deviate to the right or the left. And then, just as he was about to descend from the high rock up which he had clambered with no little difficulty in hopes of catching sight of the road from its crest, he gave a low ejaculation and crouched lower, craning his long neck forward and straining his eyes to again catch the tiny spark which had—

"Did I see it, or was it only fancy?"

In vain he strained his eyes. If not wholly fancy, the spark had died away, not to be revived.

"A lightning-bug, maybe, but one might as well chase that as a Will-o'-the-wisp!" he grimly nodded, taking careful note of the direction so that he could recover it after descending from that point of rocks.

By the time he reached the comparative level, Sunday began to doubt whether he had seen anything at all, but as he said, he might as well pick his way in that direction as any other. All points were alike to him, just then.

Though he really expected to find nothing of importance, he was too old a hand at scouting and spying not to take every precaution against blundering into possible trouble.

"It costs no more, and I've got to put in the night at this job, anyway!" he reflected, with grim philosophy. "We'll play I'm creeping up on the whole gang of rascals, and—by the Lord of Israel!"

He caught sight of a red ray of light, and crouched down with hand on one of the revolvers taken from Duck-wing, every sense fully on the alert. And as he strained his remarkably keen sense of hearing, he caught the barely audible notes of a human voice!

Crouching low, stealing along through the shadows as silently as ever a warrior stole upon a sleeping victim, the pilgrim sport advanced until he could fairly view the little fire; for the first few moments he saw nothing of greater importance.

Then, as he noiselessly shifted his position, he made out a couple of horses standing with heads drooping as though in a doze.

"That begins to look like business!" he grimly reflected, ready for hot work should the worst come to him. "Where's their masters? I'd heap rather find them than to be found first!"

As he crouched close under the shrubbery, Saul Sunday once more caught the indistinct murmur of a human voice, coming from a point on the further side of that clump of undergrowth.

With this fact to guide him, and knowing that there would be great risk of being overheard should he attempt to force a way through the scrubby bushes, he stealthily crept along the edge, hoping to thus gain a position from whence he could catch sight of the men who were talking hard by.

Fortunately for his hopes, the patch of stunted trees and bushes covered no great extent of ground, and then—he stopped short, shivering sharply like one who runs unexpectedly into deadly peril.

Clearly outlined in the moonlight he saw a long shape; faintly suggestive of the human form though it was, the detective knew as by instinct that he was looking upon a dead man.

The shock quickly passed away, however, and his curiosity still further heightened, Sunday stole a few paces nearer, pausing again as he saw a man rise up from what looked like a grave.

He had only the moonlight to aid him, but Sunday at once recognized one of the Gamecocks. That black cowl was proof sufficient.

"Two of them—how many more, I wonder?" he mentally asked himself as Yellow Pile moved aside and gave him a glimpse of his mate.

Silently slipping under the bushes, but taking care to leave himself an unobstructed view, Saul Sunday watched the outlaws as they picked up that blanketed figure, bearing it to the grave and almost without a word completing the grim task assigned them by their chief.

"Who can it be? Carl Rank? Or—Boss Clay?"

The frightened speech with which Yellow Pile had broken off that threatened hanging-bee, returned to the busy brain of the detective as he lay watching the burial.

Even while feeling that little short of a miracle could save him from death, he had noted those words, and all that had so swiftly followed had failed to blot that one name from his memory.

It was his only solid clew to the full meaning of that dark night's work, so there was little danger of his losing it through forgetfulness.

Lying there with pistol cocked and ready for

instant use in case he should be discovered by either of the wild sextons or any of their evil mates, Saul Sunday watched and listened, hoping in vain for a word or a sentence through which he could solve the mystery of that silent figure.

Dad Filkins had already finished his account of the Silver Spider and its terrible significance to the Savage family. Both he and Mike Jimsey were eager to finish their task and leave that ill-omened spot. Neither of them felt in the mood for idle talk, and so the work was completed, the dirt scattered about, the fire extinguished, their horses released and mounted.

"Go it, gentlemen!" muttered Saul Sunday, changing his position for one of greater comfort as he listened to the clatter of their hoofs in rapid retreat. "I'd have halted you both and begged the loan of a lift, only there's something lying yonder of still greater importance to me, as one of the profession. Wonder—shall I ask the little joker which? Carl Rank or Boss Clay?"

His face grew grave and hard as the last sounds of horses' hoofs died out in the distance, and satisfied that he was left alone with the dead, Saul Sunday moved from his covert and stood beside the grave.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SILVER SPIDER CONFISCATED.

SAUL SUNDAY gazed long and seriously at the damp sand which had been calculated to forever hide the terrible evidence of a hideous deed. He felt that he ought to know just what lay hidden there, in the interests of justice, but the thought of playing such a ghoulish part caused an ugly shiver to creep over his frame.

"I've been mixed up in a good many ugly deeds, but this caps the sheaf!" he muttered, brushing an unsteady hand across his brow. "If I only knew—I will know!"

With an almost savage impatience he tossed back his head and flung out a hand. It was as if he thus cast aside all scruples, for a moment later he was on his knees beside the grave, scooping out the loose sand with his curved fingers.

The work was not difficult, so far as manual labor was concerned, but it thoroughly tested the nerves of this strong man. More than once he was forced to pause, lifting his head and drawing in the cool air through his parted lips. He could not breathe with his customary freedom. There seemed some evil odor in the air.

"Lucky I'm not as superstitious as some people!" he muttered, with a swift, searching glance about him. "If I was I'd say—brace up, man!" frowning at his own weakness. "I'm trying to help justice. I'm bent on no harm to the dead. I'm only performing my duty!"

Superstitious or not, Saul Sunday felt that no good could come to him from this night's work. Though he felt that he was fully justified in pressing his investigation to the very end, as a sworn officer of the law, he would gladly have sacrificed a finger had not that grim duty been forced upon him thus.

Only his wonderful nerve carried him through, so strongly impressed was he that nothing but evil could come to him from that persistence. Had he not been one of a thousand in that respect, he would have yielded to that superstitious dread, and fled in mad haste from that unhallowed grave.

Working doggedly, he soon felt the brush with which he had seen the body covered. Removing these, he touched the woollen blanket shrouding the corpse, and curiously enough, that touch banished the gloomy fears which had been haunting him from the first.

Springing from the narrow pit, drawing a full, free breath that seemed like renewed life, Saul Sunday made a careful scout, assuring himself that there were no living beings besides himself in that vicinity.

"Just a touch of the megrims, I reckon," he laughed, softly, turning back to the grave. "I thought maybe it was because an evil eye was watching what I intended doing!"

Bending over the shallow pit, the detective gently pressed his fingers on the shrouded figure, nodding his head in satisfaction as he found he had made no mistake.

"I thought they planted him face up and head this way. Now we'll see what sort o' haul I've made, anyway!"

With his knife, working cautiously, Saul Sunday slit the blanket above the face of the unknown, then moved a little to one side in order to let the full light of the moon fall into the pit when he should part the severed blanket.

Never cooler in his life, nor with steadier nerves, the detective turned down the blanket—to utter a sharp cry as he recognized the blood-marked face of his recent companion, Carl Rank.

"I feared it!" he muttered, staring darkly at that grim sight. "I hardly dared hope it would prove to be the one that rascal called Boss Clay. Poor fellow!"

With a long sigh, the detective bent forward and gently touched the bruised forehead where the haft of Boyd Savage's knife had struck. It

was natural that he should take this mark for the cause of Carl Rank's death, and his action was purely involuntary, but as his finger tip made no impression, Saul Sunday gave a sharp start.

"The bone is sound enough! That never killed him—if he is dead!"

It was a wild, visionary hope that flashed into the busy brain of the detective, and one that vanished almost as soon as born. But Saul Sunday acted as though it still lingered, clearing away the rest of the earth until he could slip his hands under the body and drag it from the shallow grave.

Using his knife, Sunday extended that slit through the blanket until he could turn it back on either side to the waist of the body.

His sensitive fingers failed to detect any beat of the pulse as he lifted an arm. And then, to make all sure, he parted the torn garments over the breast—to start back with a low, shivering cry as the light of the moon fell fairly upon the Silver Spider!

"Merciful heavens! poisoned by those devils!"

So clear was the light that he could trace the tiny drops of blood drawn by those venomous claws, contrasting with the white skin, and though the poisoned barbs themselves were hidden from view, Saul Sunday only too surely divined what held that hideous mechanism in place.

For a few moments he shrunk away, staring at the metal bug with mingled fear and anger; but the latter emotion quickly gained the ascendancy, and with a tightly clenched hand uplifted he cried:

"As Heaven hears me, poor fellow, I'll hunt those devils from the face of the earth though it ends in my own destruction!"

That outburst seemed to do him good. It served to cool him down in a measure, and once more Saul Sunday could move and act with his usual cool, keen nerve.

He bent forward and keenly scanned that loathsome work of devilish vengeance. He saw that something was carved upon the partly polished back, and as the light was insufficient to enable him to decipher these symbols, he struck a match, cautiously shading it with his curved palms so that the rays could only fall upon the Silver Spider.

"W, the figure three, and another letter, Y," he muttered, before the slender torch burned itself out. "Nothing very intelligible, but smaller clues than these have hunted a criminal to the gallows! And then, after all, the fellow who carved those initials could not have killed poor Rank with his own hand. That was the work of the Gamecocks, and I know at least one of the gang—Duck-wing!"

He started to his feet and turned half away, as though to make all haste to the spot where he had left that rascal to fight against his bonds for freedom. Only to halt, with a short, hard laugh.

"Where is he? I couldn't go back there in the dark if my own life depended upon it. And if I should find him, what then? He'd grit his teeth and die at the stake before peaching on his mates!"

Saul Sunday turned again to his ill-fated companion of the past evening, gravely, sternly gazing down upon his ghastly face with its stonily staring eyes.

"Hard lines, pardner!" he murmured, his own lines softening as he wondered who and how many loved ones might be waiting and longing for tidings from this murdered wanderer. "I'm sadly afraid that if you and I hadn't met by chance, you'd be alive and well this moment. Those devils were looking for me, and they took you in for that. Well, if it's any satisfaction to your soul, I'll swear to exact bitter vengeance for your death. More than that no man can offer!"

Again Saul Sunday knelt beside the murdered man, closely and carefully examining the Silver Spider, which he had not as yet ventured to touch with even the tip of a finger. He examined it with such care that he detected a slight projection on each side of the body, low down on the edges, which he fancied might possibly have something to do with working those poisoned claws.

"Stands to reason there must be something of the sort, for no sane man would carry such a venomous critter about with him unless those nippers could be kept under cover. All the same, I'm running no long chances."

Picking up a splinter of stone, and using his knife-point with his other hand, Saul Sunday pressed steadily on the twin edges, giving a little start as the spider rolled from the dead man's bosom to the blanket where turned back.

With glowing eyes the detective bent forward, to see that the fatal bug lay on its back, the claws no longer visible.

"Shall I or sha'n't I?" he mused, frowning as he drew back a bit, though still gazing at the spider. "It's an ugly thing to carry about with a fellow as ticklish as I'm apt to be, on occasions; but can I afford to leave it here?"

He quickly decided to the contrary, and cutting off a fold of the blanket, he rolled the spider into his doubled kerchief, pressing several folds over the place where the poisoned claws came out, then wound the heavy woolen about

it all. With a bit of string he made all secure, before stowing it away in his pocket.

"I reckon the thing can't bite through all those folds," he muttered, brushing a hand across his damp brow. "Anyway, I've got to take the chances, for I can't go back on a clew like that. I'll make it feed the gallows before I'm a month older, or I'll change my trade!"

Fully satisfied that poor Rank was dead and past further help, the detective gently drew the severed blanket over his ghastly face, and carefully lowered his body into the shallow grave.

"I'll find the place again when I've more time to spare, poor fellow," he reflected while replacing the leafy branches before pushing back the loose earth as he had found it. "I'll see that you have a more Christian burial. But just now—I believe that if you could have a wish or could make it known, you'd bid me hunt down your assassin the first thing!"

Working rapidly, Saul Sunday soon completed his grim task, and after taking a careful look to see that he had left no particular signs to betray what he had done, he moved away from the spot, following in the tracks of Yellow Pile and his mate.

"They'll never suspect aught unless they take the trouble to open the grave. If they should do that, the missing spider and the cut blanket would give 'em a start; but what else? Not the knowledge that Solemn Saul has been at work, anyway!"

Reasoning that the two outlaws who had plainly been left behind the main force for the express purpose of burying their victim, being free from that duty, would lose little time in leaving the trackless hills for easier riding along the regular road between Up-grade and P. M. City, Saul Sunday took care to select the line most convenient for mounted men to follow, after once losing the faint trail along which he had started.

"Maybe I'm a fool for not taking to snug cover and waiting for break of day," he reflected, as he doggedly pressed on. "Maybe I'll run into a trap set by those mongrel Gamecocks—save the mark! But I'm taking the chances. I started to make P. M. City this night, and I'll never turn it up while I've got an ounce of travel in me!"

Acting on this stubborn line the detective pressed on briskly, though not without taking ordinary precautions against attracting unwelcome attention should any of the outlaws be lingering about in hopes of stumbling upon the victim who had so narrowly escaped their verdict.

But fortune seemed weary of making the detective her football, for the time being, at least, and almost without warning Saul Sunday found himself out in the plain road once more. Almost, but not quite.

His keen ear caught the sound of a hoof-stroke, and as he leaped aside to seek cover he saw a diminutive shape lazily rising from the earth, stretching out a shaggy neck and giving a wide yawn that would doubtless have degenerated into a prolonged and far-reaching bray, had not Sunday leaped forward and forced those jaws shut!

And mounting, ten seconds more carried him into the road!

"It's neck or nothing now," he grimly muttered as he pressed his lazy steed forward. "If they're lying in wait—so mote it be!"

CHAPTER XVII.

A GRIM VIGIL.

THROUGH the night rode Boyd Savage, a hand on the halter-strap of the horse nearest him: the horse that bore so ghastly a burden.

Once so full of life and strength and insolent grace: once—and that so very recently—a perfect picture while in the saddle, an equestrian born, not made.

Now—riding with back bent and drooping head, swaying with each stride of the horse, kept from falling only by those carefully applied bonds, from doubling sideways only by the strong sticks which had been strapped to the saddle and acting as braces to that nerveless figure.

A grim and ghastly companion for a night ride, even without ties of blood: how much more terrible must have been that journey when brother led brother—when each side glance must show the living man his dead counterpart, his own self in every form and feature.

Few men could have endured that long, weary, torturing ordeal without breaking down, and fewer still without giving some outward sign of emotion. But Boyd Savage was no ordinary man, and he pressed steadily on through the night, making no sign that could betray his real grief to the watchful eyes of his silent followers.

His pace was regulated more for his brother than himself. This was the last journey Clay Savage would ever undertake: he must make it as smooth and pleasant as lay in his power.

"He'd do as much and more for me—Clay would! And why—if I hadn't have listened to you, boy!" his head drooping for a brief space and the trail growing dim and misty before him.

Not for long. With a proud, almost vicious toss that weak spell was flung off. Once more

the sullenly glowing eyes of the Gamecock picked out the easiest route through that tangled wilderness of rocks and shrubs and pitfalls.

Silently the outlaws followed their leader, two of them at least wishing they were far distant from that proximity, by no means satisfied that their fault had been forgotten or would be overlooked by their chief.

Without a break or a halt Boyd Savage pressed on through the hills, shaping his course so as to reach the lone cabin which, among themselves, was known as the Den.

To many others, thanks to the cunning of the outlaw band and to the superstition which is rarely absent from the roving class to which prospectors generally belong, the lone cabin was an object to be shunned at almost any cost. It was "bad medicine." It was "haunted."

That an awful tragedy had marked it out as one of those significant landmarks with which the gold and silver bearing regions are so plentifully endowed, was a fact beyond dispute. The rest followed, almost as a matter of course.

Steadily as he had led that grim march, it took nearly two hours for Boyd Savage to bring his ghastly companion to the Den, counting from the moment when he parted with Dad Filkins on the spot where two victims had been claimed by the dread Death Spider.

"I'll do this," coldly uttered the chief, sharply motioning his men aside as they silently offered their aid in taking that ghastly rider from the saddle. "Go you and strike a light inside, Marty. You others scout around and make sure there's no skulkers nigh, but keep within call in case of need."

By no means loth to escape handling the body of one who had met such a strange death, the trio moved away to follow orders, leaving Boyd Savage alone with his dead brother.

Cutting away the bonds and supports, holding that strangely limp figure with a firmly gentle grasp, Boyd Savage drew it from the saddle and bore it into the cabin, the walls of which were made of rough stones, surface-quarried, laid up with mud-mortar. Only the roof was composed of wood, for in the mining regions timber is too scarce, too valuable to be wasted in forming cabins.

Gently lowering the body to the earthen floor, near the huge fireplace which occupied one end of the single room, Savage took the rude tin lamp from Marty's hand, nodding his head toward the door.

"You can go, Brass-back. Watch for the old gentleman, down by the Twin Humps. Let him pass in silence, but if any other happens your way, give me warning. But you understand all that?"

"I'll do my level best, your Honor," quietly responded Marty.

"I know that, or I'd not be trusting you so thoroughly. Go, now. I want to be alone."

The outlaw shivered as he cast a furtive glance at that ghastly face, yonder. Alone! with that for company!

"It'd kill me in less than an hour, but I reckon he's made of tougher metal," muttered the outlaw as he strode away from the lone cabin to reach his post. "It's that, for he can feel—he does feel this blow, and feels it as not one man in a hundred could feel!"

Yet there was scant show of emotion in the deliberate manner in which Boyd Savage set about kindling a fire in the wide-mouthed fireplace.

There were kindlings and small wood stored in the corner, and from this stock the Gamecock quickly had a cheerful blaze crackling on the hearth of baked earth. And then he made a couple of trips to the outside, carrying in a stock of heavier fagots quite sufficient to last through the remainder of the night.

Even then he stood before the fire, staring silently into its ruddy depths, without so much as a glance toward that silent shape, over whose pale, handsome features the light was merrily dancing.

With an abrupt gesture the giant tore from his head that ugly cowl, crumpling it up and tossing it into the flames as though he forever discarded such means of concealment.

"Never more—never again until I have stood over the cold carcass of that fiend—as I now stand beside you, brother!"

Pierce, vicious, savage as his name came the first words, but as his bloodshot eyes turned to that strangely handsome face of the dead, his voice broke and grew softer, almost tender with love and grief.

Marty was right. Boyd Savage could feel. And, grimly as he had borne up thus far, it needed but the proper touch to break him down entirely for the time being.

He rolled a chunk of wood over until it lay close to that body.

He sat down upon it, his elbows supported by his doubled-up knees, his clinched hands buried in that silken beard, his gaze riveted on the face of his dead brother.

How strangely handsome was that face, despite its awful pallor, despite those sightless eyes, which refused to be covered by their lids, despite the frozen look of unutterable horror, which he could still decipher in those film-covered balls.

Boyd Savage shivered convulsively as he gazed. The crackling fire was casting out its grateful warmth, but he never felt it. Cold—he bent forward, and mechanically touched a finger to that white brow, to see if it could lend a sensation of warmth to his hand.

The touch broke that strange spell, and with a start, Boyd Savage drew back, casting a swift, fiery glance around the room.

"Am I going crazy?" he muttered, drawing a trembling hand across his face, as though to brush away some frightening vision. "No—ten thousand times over, no!" leaping to his feet, and shaking his tightly clinched fist above his head. "Not until I've run the devilish assassin down! Not until I have torn him limb from limb! Not until he has been made to suffer a score deaths for each one of these three foul murders!"

He crossed over to the rear wall, fumbling in the corner for a brief space, then pulling out a log which seemed to work on a pivot. Running a hand through the opening, he drew forth a flask of liquor, from which he drank a long, deep draught.

Closing the opening, placing the flask on the rude table, Boyd Savage once more resumed his seat by the side of his brother.

"You wouldn't play the weakling if I lay where you are, and you sat watching over me, Clay!" he muttered, the hard lines on his face beginning to soften. "You'd think only of vengeance—as I'll think and plan from this time on!"

"If I only knew—if I had but the slightest clew to work on!"

That was the worst of it all. The hideous blows were dealt so surely and so secretly. The slayer did his awful work, then vanished without leaving behind him the faintest clew; only those hideous spiders, which he had chosen as his tools. And they—two letters, a figure, rudely carved in metal. Nothing more to identify them, nothing at all to identify the maker, or the hand that touched the springs, and sent those venomous claws to claim their prey!

"W—Y! What name can they stand for? Do they mean a name—the name of one who has taken an oath to wipe our family from the face of the earth? Or—he can tell if he will!" with a black frown gathering his golden eyebrows. "And when he comes here—when he looks down on your face, brother—the third face marked by that devilish spider—tell he shall, if I have to choke the whole truth out of his reluctant lips!"

His mutterings died away with that fierce threat, and in silence Boyd Savage resumed his grim vigil.

The glow faded out of his big eyes, and they soon began to glisten from a far different cause. The ruddy rays of the fire marked tear after tear as the bright drops silently trickled down his cheeks, quivering on that silken beard, then falling to the earthen floor.

Few who knew the man could have credited this, even had they been hidden witnesses to his silent grief. They could more readily have doubted their own eyesight than believed Boyd Savage capable of shedding a tear for mortal being, living or dead.

Yet they would have wronged him. There was one soft spot left unseared in that crime-hardened heart. He loved his brothers as only men of his strong nature can love. And of them all, this brother had been dearest and nearest to his heart.

Perhaps because he came next in age; there was little more than a year between them; perhaps because they were identical in spirit, in nature, in manner of thought, even as they were so strangely similar in face and figure.

It had often been remarked by those who saw them; this strong family resemblance, as well as the curious fact that while all looked like each other, the likeness was more pronounced when those nearest in age were taken together.

As the eldest son, Boyd was nearer the size, most like his father. Clay came next, and he resembled Boyd more than he did his sire. Dale followed, and he was smaller in size and bulk than either of his elder brothers, even as they were smaller than their gigantic sire.

"Lucky there came no more, or I'd blush to find myself the father of pigmies!" grim old Ambrose was wont to say. "Time to call a halt when the Savage stock is degenerating so abominably!"

Strange how all these thoughts recurred to that silent man, bowed over his dead. Strange how his dulled brain could stoop to such trifles while that loved brother lay dead—and unavenged!

Time and again Boyd Savage aroused, swearing at his own stupidity, only to sink back into that vague stage which was neither sleeping nor waking, but midway betwixt the two.

Again he roused himself, but this time to leap to his feet and cross the room at a stride, flinging wide the door and crossing the threshold, revolver in hand.

The swift thumping of horses' hoofs came to his ears, and as a pair of riders came into view, his weapon went up—to sink again as he recognized his father and his brother Dale.

"You, Boyd?" came a harsh voice from the foremost rider as his strong hand wrenched up his panting steed, its steaming muzzle almost touching the broad breast of the watcher. "Where is he—my boy?"

"Waiting for you—waiting to see if those he loved in life are men—or curs, too cowardly to avenge his death!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A VICIOUS YOUNG SAVAGE.

AMBROSE SAVAGE leaped to the ground, brushing that stalwart figure aside with a single sweep of his mighty arm, then entering the cabin.

And when Dale, the brother next younger than Clay, stepped across the threshold, he beheld his father kneeling by the side of the corpse.

There were no tears in his eyes. His face was white, but if it had been cast in marble, it could not have looked colder, harder, or betrayed less of human emotion such as might naturally be expected in a father gazing upon the face of a murdered son.

"Who did it, father?" harshly demanded Boyd Savage, his hand falling heavily on those massive shoulders.

With a grating curse the giant old man flung that hand off, rising to his feet and flashing a fiery gaze into the pale face of his first born as he cried in turn:

"Ay, who did it, boy? I saw him go away under your charge. I find him here—cold in death! Who did it, I ask you again?"

"Look!" and stooping, Boyd touched the cold cheek where could be seen the tiny wounds made by those poisoned claws, visible through the silken beard by that ruddy light. "Have you forgotten what makes a mark like that? Have you forgotten how two other gallant lads died?"

With a choking gasp the old giant shrunk back, shivering like one suddenly chilled to the marrow, his still handsome face turning a shade paler, his great eyes catching a haunted look as they rested on those tell-tale marks.

"Not—not that?" he panted, huskily.

"Just that, father," was the cold retort. "The Silver Spider has claimed one more victim."

"Where is the devil?" fiercely cried Dale, coming forward and confronting his elder brother. "Who let him do this, and still get away?"

"Ay! you say well, brother! The devil he must be, for though Clay was still warm—though I could feel his warm flesh still quivering as I touched it—the assassin was gone, leaving no trace behind. No trace but this," and he bowed toward the silent figure on the floor.

"Tell me all—tell me just how it came about, Boyd," said Ambrose Savage, resting on a corner of the punchon table, his massive features once more like a mask of marble. "Don't miss an item, however simple you may deem it. My eyes may see more than yours did, old though they are. Go on—curse you, go on!"

A brief flash of anger, then that unnatural calm. And with his gaze steadily fixed on the face of his murdered son, Ambrose Savage listened to the story his first born had to tell.

Outwardly as calm and collected as his parent, Boyd obeyed, concealing nothing, but condensing his narrative into marvelously few words that told all it was necessary to learn. All that he could tell, though the one vital point was left in utter darkness; there was not a clew however slight, to the assassin's identity.

"You were not to blame, my son," gravely commented the father, with a long breath as Boyd ceased speaking. "I know that you did all that mortal man could do, all that I could have done myself had I been on the spot. Yet have you no suspicion?"

"If I had been there!" grated the younger Savage, fiercely.

"If I had been there—and he had been safe at home!" echoed Ambrose Savage, with the first and only trace of emotion he had as yet exhibited. "I'm old and played out. It wouldn't seem so hard if I had been taken. But Clay—"

He left the sentence incomplete, tossing back his head until his long hair flew back of his ears. With that gesture all emotion was banished from face and voice. He was once more "The Savage."

"You asked me if I had any suspicions, father," slowly uttered Boyd, a reddish glow coming into his blue eyes. "I might have had if—but you? You can show us where to look for this prowling devil, father! You denied it once, but I believe you lied. Who is this man whose initials are W. Y.?"

The Savage started as if in anger at those blunt words, but then his clinched hand lowered to his side as he said:

"You might have had it—what, Boyd?"

"If I had only been certain Enos Dunbar was outside of P. M. City early this night!"

"He was—I can take an oath to that!" eagerly cried Dale Savage. "He rode out of town on the Up-grade trail before dark. He came back after dark, only an hour or so before word reached us from you, Boyd."

"You are sure of this, brother?"

"Dead sure! Why not, when I've been watching his every movement for two days? You know that much, father, even if Boyd has forgotten."

"I know I set you on duty, yes."

"And I know that never living man played spy better than I. You never bade me follow the rascal in case he should leave town."

White as the corpse lying unheeded for the moment, his eyes fairly blazing with deadly vengeance, Boyd Savage cried out:

"Then I swear that Enos Dunbar is the foul assassin of our three brothers!"

"I begin to think it, myself, lads," grimly nodded the old giant. "But where are our proofs?"

"What proofs are needed? Isn't that proof enough?" pointing down at the senseless clay.

"But if you want more—listen: You know what duty I undertook. You know that with my Gamecocks I had the Up-grade trail under guard by the middle of the afternoon, watching for the detective who we had word was on the road and due at P. M. to-day. And I know that Enos Dunbar never passed by our blockade. Then—where did he go? What was he doing during all those hours?"

"I can't answer those questions, but I can tell you what he did immediately after returning home," harshly laughed the younger Savage.

"What was that?"

"Used his riding whip up over the shoulders of our sweet Kid!"

"Careful, boy!" flashed the old man. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I say: that Enos Dunbar caught Enos sparking his girl under the back fence, and dusted his jacket for him, too mighty hot!"

"You saw this? And you never told me?"

"I saw the whole performance, and I meant to have told you all about it when I gave in my report, but you remember that I hadn't time before word came from Boyd. I'll tell you now, if you care to listen."

"Horsewhipped him! My son! And—Kid didn't kill the hound?"

"Never a bit of it, sir, else I'd have reported long before. When I saw Dunbar last, he was busy with his papers, in his private room at his own house. As for Kid—I'll never tell you where he went! To the river, perhaps, to wash out his shame. I didn't feel interest enough in the cur to investigate."

"If your brother is a cur—"

"If he isn't, I'll eat my hat!" flashed the young savage, viciously adding: "Don't call him brother to me! Thank heaven his mother wasn't mine! At worst, he's only a half!"

"Steady, boy!" warningly muttered Boyd.

"Half-brother I started to say," with an ugly sneer in face and voice. "More than that I'll never own up to; wish I could deny even so much!"

"Talk to the point, you young rascal!" frowned his father. "Tell us just what happened, and leave off all the frills. Out with it!"

"You know what you told me: to watch Enos Dunbar and make a note of his comings and his goings. All right, I've got them all noted down in short-hand, back at the Wigwam, ready for your inspection. Now for the part Kid played this evening."

"I watched Dunbar out of town, seeing him well along the Up-grade road, then I come back to town. I meant to call on you to report, but I saw you nip the Kid, and concluded you'd like to have him to yourself for a bit."

"After a little I went back to Dunbar's place, on the chance of picking up something more, perhaps from the nigger, or even the girl Kid is so sweet on. And when I saw her stealing out to the lower end of the yard, to the by-path where I knew she and Kid had met before, I lay low and waited for what might turn up."

"The first thing was Kid himself. The next—well, if the telling would make you as gaggy as the seeing did me, better pass over that part of the programme!"

"Did you hear what passed between them?"

"Heard and saw, both, but I can't put it into words," with a grin. "If I had a fit subject handy, I might illustrate to you—"

"Skip that, then. I meant words, not kisses, you rascal."

"I couldn't hear enough to make out anything beyond the loving, until I heard the old man riding up. Then I lay low, looking for fun, for I saw he'd glimpsed the twin spoons by the back fence. Then—it came, red-hot!"

"He jumped them, from behind, and used his whip like a nailer! And as the Kid whirled about, I saw the lash stripe his face from top to bottom."

Ambrose Savage ground his teeth viciously, his face flushing as hotly as though he himself felt that shameful lash.

"And the Kid? He didn't—"

"Yes he did—show himself more of a cur than even I had ever given him credit for!" flashed the vicious young savage.

Speaking rapidly, he told how that pitiful scene between lover and father ended, sparing no details, lingering on those points which, to his evil mind, showed Enos in the most contemptible light.

"Think of it, will you!" he snarled, viciously.

"Lashed like an egg-sucking cur, and when he'd got the upper hand—when he could have forever wiped the foul blot from the name he bears in common with men, when his knife was touching the face of the old devil—he threw away his tools and meekly rose to bow his head once more before the rascal who had so bitterly disgraced him, almost begging another flogging!"

"And you—you stood by and saw it all?"

"Ay!" with fierce emphasis. "I stood by and never lifted a hand. I stood by, even when Dunbar pulled a gun on the cur as he held both hands behind him—and I prayed that the old man might blow him through as one too utterly despicable for further life!"

"Why didn't you down the old rascal?"

"I intended doing so—after he had killed the Kid," was the cold retort. "The girl saved the coward, however, and I let the play go on. I was too thoroughly disgusted to interfere, after that."

For a brief space silence reigned, Ambrose Savage thoughtfully staring into the fire. Then he spoke, in softer tones:

"After all, I'm not so mighty sorry this has happened, for it may be the making of the lad, when he learns that you saw and we know all that happened him after he left me, this night. With the marks of that fellow's whip across his face, he's no son of mine if his foolish fancy for the girl doesn't die out forever. If not—"

"You'll cuddle and pet him all the same, of course!" growled Dale, his usually handsome face—the family face—looking fairly repulsive in the ruddy light.

"If not—I'll kill him with my own hands rather than see him mate with the spawn of that devil!" harshly growled the old man.

"As I hoped to see old Dunbar kill him, back yonder," laughed the younger savage. "And then I'd have jumped the rascal and run him to a noosed rope, too quick!"

"Let the Kid drop for now," coldly interposed Boyd, with a swift glance down at the face of his murdered brother. "There's another and more important point to settle just now. Father?"

"What is it?"

"You know whose hand has dealt us these three bitter blows. You know who made those devilish spiders and carved his initials on them to tell you his revenge was still alive and working. Now—tell us who and what those letters—W. Y.—stand for!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE STORY OF WALLACE YARROW.

"You have got it—that cursed spider?"

"No. I left it behind with—Are your wits wool-gathering, old man?" gruffly frowned his first-born. "Have you forgotten so soon? Or are you trying to choke us off from what we have a right to know?"

"Look out you!" flashed the giant in turn. "I'm old—older by years since looking on that," with a glance toward the body on the floor; "but I'm the best man left in the list, even yet. And if you feel my knuckles at your throat, boy, you'll be the first to cry as much."

"Yes or no, that don't count. There's only three of us left, now, and while that black debt remains unpaid, we've no right to fight among ourselves."

"Then put a curb on your tongue, boy!"

"And you take the curb off yours, old man!"

"You mean—"

"Just what I've been saying ever since you came here; that you must know the devil who owns those two initials."

"If I did—I wish I did—for dead sure!" muttered the old man, his face turning paler, his great eyes catching something of the wild light which superstitious prospectors sometimes carried while in the neighborhood of "the haunted cabin."

"Can you take oath you don't know?"

"I could if—if you'll prove there's no such thing as the dead coming back to walk the earth."

Boyd Savage burst into a short, harsh laugh, contempt and anger mingling with the impatience written upon his handsome face as one hand flew out toward that last victim of their doomed race.

"I can prove it, even plain enough for a crack-brain. What? you are growing so soft, so infernally idiotic as to think that there is any such thing as life beyond the grave? That dead men can move and act and—Bah! If so, would Clay be lying there, silent and unmoved, while we were puzzling over the identity of his foul assassin? Wouldn't he shout out that name? Or, if you think he's too young in the spirit world, would not Arch or Marsh have brought us the word?"

Ambrose Savage slowly shook his head, though it was evident he had no easy task to refute that impatient argument.

"It's nothing new you're flinging at me, son. I've run over it all, time without number, and as often found myself just where I begun. All I know is this: the only man I ever gave cause for revenge who could claim those initials for his own, is dead and rotted years ago!"

"Then he left a son to carry out that revenge in his name!"

"He was married when I knew him, but he had no children."

"Then you were fooled—you didn't kill him—for keeps."

"I saw his grave," moodily muttered the old man.

"Then where does old Dunbar come in at?" impatiently interjected the younger Savage.

"Satan roast him—that's just what I've been trying to puzzle out for a year past!" flashed Ambrose Savage, giving his mighty frame a shake that sent his yellow locks flying like the mane of an enraged lion.

Boyd came closer, his sinewy fingers gripping the arm of his parent and making even that giant wince.

"Let Enos Dunbar rest until after you have told us the story of the man you believed you put under the daisies, father. When we've heard all, perhaps we can lend a hint that may lead you to the truth. For the last time: who could claim those initials?"

"Wallace Yarrow might, but—"

"Then out with the story of Wallace Yarrow!"

"If you will have it—all right. Only—bring in a blanket from the workshop, Dale. I can't talk—I can't tell that story while his eyes are staring at me like that!"

Something like contempt flashed into the face of the younger Savage, but even he was not reckless enough to give the feeling open expression. Though he felt "the old man" was growing childish, he knew that strong arm was none the weaker for passing years.

He strode to the rear wall, and under his practiced touch, an irregular-shaped door swung open, revealing a dark passage seemingly running back into the hill, against which the cabin was crowded. After a brief absence he returned with a coarse blanket over an arm.

Boyd Savage dropped his handkerchief over that cold face, then covered the figure over with the blanket.

"Now you can talk on, father."

"The lad had nothing to do with it, of course. It all happened before any of you were born. Yet—I'm a bit shook up, maybe. But I couldn't talk of it with his face—bah!" with another characteristic toss of his lionine head, drawing a deep, full breath before adding: "It's gone, now, and I'm Old Savage once more!"

"Time enough, too, I'm thinking," growled Dale, dropping down with his back against the wall.

"This Wallace Yarrow was—who and what, father?"

"A young fellow whose folks had neighbored us for years, back in Kentucky. He was more smart than wise, people reckoned; one of those budding geniuses who are always on the point of startling the whole world, yet who never do succeed in setting the river afire."

"Wake me up when Kirby dies!" yawned Dale, with exaggerated sleepiness, while Boyd impatiently said:

"Must you go back so far, old man? Can't you skip the preliminaries and give up the meat in a lump?"

"You'll take the story after my way, or not at all," with a grim nod. "I'll cut it as short as I can. I'm not over fond of recalling it now that my head has grown cooler."

"As I said, they called young Yarrow a genius, but he was only budding, and hadn't really found out what particular bent that genius ought to take. For one thing—and you'll guess what makes me mention that particular point—he dabbled in chemistry and—"

"Poisons!" sharply ejaculated Boyd, while even Dale gave a start.

"Maybe so," nodded their father, with a fleeting smile. "All I knew then was that the young fellow more than hinted at some tremendous discovery; the transmutation of metals, or something equally as preposterous."

"Some of the people believed him, too, and more than anything else that silly notion won Yarrow a wife—the only daughter of the richest planter in our section."

"Then—well, I was a wild blade, and I never liked Yarrow or his people. The girl he married was pretty as a picture, gay as a lark, with just a spice of the devil in her veins. And while Wallace stuck to his books and his filthy drugs and his musty old manuscripts, Kate ran at loose, riding, hunting, fishing—ten times more of a man than the one she had flung herself away on."

"And seeing this, you took pity on her, of course?"

"More than that; I took the girl herself."

"And her husband? Of course he kicked at that kindness?"

There was no immediate reply. Ambrose Savage stared moodily into the fire, one arm akimbo, the other bent upward to push a lock of his luxuriant beard between his teeth.

"Time's passing, father, and we've got plenty of work to do before the dawn comes," added Boyd, with a meaning glance toward their dead. "In one word—did you shoot Wallace Yarrow before or after you took his wife under your wing?"

"Neither," was the crisp reply. "If he had been more of a man, more nearly a match for me, I might have shot him decently. He gave me excuse enough. He sent two bullets into my body, when he caught up with Kate and I, and if he'd spent more time in manly sports, I reckon the Savage family would never have grown so large!"

"As it was—well, a man can't stand forever and let a fool use him for a target. So—I jumped the fellow and pounded him a bit. A little harder than I intended, at first, for one of his pills begun to bite me mighty sharp, just then, and I really reckoned he'd checked my baggage for the through trip!"

"But you didn't kill him?"

"Not then," with that troubled light coming back to his eyes. "I left him lying in the street, for I had other work on hand. Two of Kate's people came at me, just then, and I had to burn powder. When we got through, they lay still enough. And—Kate lay between us."

"They shot her, too?"

"Somebody did. Maybe they, maybe me. I was half blind through it all, and they say the girl ran in between us to stop the racket. So—she caught it from one side or the other."

"And Yarrow?"

"I'm not so clear on that point. A friend stood by me, and when there grew up a talk of rope and stretching, he helped me away. The wild ride did me good, I reckon, though I can't recall much about it, until a month or two later when I woke up on the other side of the river. For I'd caught three more chunks of lead from Kate's people."

"My friend took a trip over to see what the prospects were, and when he come back he told me I'd better travel for my health; that the whole neighborhood was up in arms, vowing to follow and string me up to the nearest tree, for shooting Kate."

"He said Yarrow had died of his hurts, only a week before. Up to that time he said the fellow had been crazy, from the thumping I gave him."

"Was it a lie, or a mistake? One or the other, else why is each one of those devilish spiders marked with his initials?"

"That I can't explain. All I know is that years afterward, when the storm blew over and I went back home, they showed me the grave where Wallace Yarrow was buried."

"By some one who lied, or who was paid to fool you," grimly nodded Dale Savage. "Dollars to cents Enos Dunbar is Wallace Yarrow!"

"If so, he's changed mightily in looks and manner," frowned the old man. "I can't think you're right—and yet you may be! Though I've tried hard to get the notion out of my head, it keeps coming back to me that I've met Dunbar before—many years ago! But when and where and how—that I can't figure out!"

"Let that point rest for the present, then, and go on; when did this affair happen; before, or after your first marriage?"

"Before. I married the girl who lived where my friend took me, on the Ohio side of the river. Only for her I'd never have recovered my senses after being put upon her bed. She nursed me night and day, and—well, maybe it was a sorry reward, but I married her. And as long as she lived, lads, I swear by her memory that I never gave thought to any other woman."

"Pity you didn't stick to that notion a little longer!" frowned Dale, with an ugly glitter in his big blue eyes.

"You sinner!" flashed Ambrose, sternly. "The Kid's mother was an angel on earth; she's one up above, if such things be."

"And Kid's one here below! Anyway, he's too mighty angelic to live any longer in the same section with me," growled the incorrigible.

"You lift a finger against him without my permission, and there's one Savage who'll cheat the Death Spider!"

"Bottle it, Dale. We can't afford to quarrel among ourselves while that foul poisoner lives to gloat over his devilish work. Three times he's dealt his cowardly blow! Three gallant lads gone—and this the best, the bravest, the truest of them all, living or dead!"

His voice growing choked with the powerful emotions which he had so fiercely held in check, Boyd Savage uncovered the face of his brother, kneeling and bowing his head until his livid lips touched the scars left by that deadly instrument of vengeance.

"As Heaven covers us, brother," he murmured, huskily, "I'll never know rest or quiet until I've solved this hideous mystery and brought your dastardly murderer to justice! With my own hand I'll kill him! Kill him—but make him suffer a thousand deaths in one!"

CHAPTER XX.

"EYE FOR EYE, AND TOOTH FOR TOOTH."

"ADD another cipher, brother, and call it my contribution," said Dale, rising and gently placing a hand on the bent head of his elder brother. "I'm mighty loose in the tongue, but—I can feel!"

Boyd Savage turned, and, still on his knees, gave a hand to each. The trio gazed into each other's eyes silently; but those eyes spoke more eloquently than nimble tongues.

Then Boyd Savage rose to his feet, giving his massive frame a rough shake, speaking coldly:

"That's enough for now. Business presses. What are we going to do with Clay? Take him to town for the crowd to wonder over?"

Ambrose Savage shook his head, slowly saying: "Can we afford that? Can we stand all the idle gossip? And if Enos Dunbar is really our game, shall we let him have such a chance to crow over us, even though he has to do it in secret?"

"Give me permission, sir, and I'll cut his crowing mighty short," quietly said Dale.

Ambrose Savage softly patted the young man on the arm, but never took his anxious gaze from the face of his first-born.

"Of course he'll know, if he is our man," moodily muttered the elder son. "Act how we may, we can never cheat him out of his secret triumph."

"But we can keep the crowd in ignorance until we've settled on some plan for getting even, if we plant him out here," quickly said Dale.

"I reckon it's best that way, father," with a long breath, that was almost a sigh. "We want to be free for work. And if we have to go through the regular form of a funeral down yonder we'll lose precious time, to say nothing of the ugly questions that may be asked. It might be hard to explain just how brother Clay chanced to cross the range!"

Boyd Savage was thinking just then of the second victim claimed by the Death Spider that night, and of the other pilgrim who had been caught in company with the ill-fated detective, Carl Rank.

If his Gamecocks had done their duty as expected of them, there would be still a third body to dispose of.

"Well, only for a time, then," reluctantly muttered Ambrose. "If he could know it all, I don't reckon the lad would kick; he was ever the most tractable of the tribe, Clay was."

Without another word, moving so quickly that it almost seemed as though he feared the discussion might break out afresh if delay was made, Boyd Savage passed through the rear wall of the cabin, soon returning with a spade and a pickaxe.

Stepping to the door, he paused and bent his head for an instant in thought. Then, laying down his tools, he passed out of the cabin, his clear whistle floating far away through the waning night.

In a very brief space Shawl-neck and his mate came silently up, secretly fearing the worst, but still more afraid to refuse obedience to that signal.

"You can go, fellows," coldly uttered Savage. "Get into town without attracting attention, and act precisely as though you had never left it this night. Hold yourselves in readiness for work when the sign is posted in the usual place. Off with you!"

The two men hurriedly passed away, and feeling no further uneasiness on that score, Boyd returned to the interior, curtly explaining the full meaning of his action.

"No doubt we could have trusted the rascals, and they could have shared our work, but I thought it best to keep his hiding-place secret from all save his own relatives. Was I right, father?"

Ambrose nodded assent, and catching up the pick, he left the cabin before his first-born could interpose.

"It cuts him mighty deep, though he tries to hide it!" he muttered, with a lingering look at their dead. "I meant for him to watch, but you'll do that, boy."

"Watch you, brother, and let me use the spade," said Dale, with far more of gentleness than he often betrayed. "I know how you and Clay were ever the thickest. Stay and watch him; it'll not be for long that you and he can be together, brother."

He, too, without giving Boyd a chance to speak, hurried out of the cabin to join his father, who had already picked out a spot for the grave; a little nook between two huge boulders, with the curving top of a tree overhanging both.

He had already broken the hard crust, and now stood aside for his son to throw out the lumps with his spade.

Not a word passed between them, as they labored on, each in turn using his implement, rapidly opening the pit which was to soon hide from mortal eyes the third victim of the Silver Spider.

And while they labored thus, Boyd Savage knelt beside his dead brother, tears once more dimming his eyesight, and glistening in the ruddy light of the fire, as they rolled down his yellow beard.

Not a sound parted his lips; not a word did he speak. But who can say that, crime-stained though he was, no sincere prayer found birth in his heart?

He was kneeling thus, when the slow steps of Ambrose Savage came near the door. When the father opened the barrier, Boyd was on his feet, cold and motionless as ever.

"Is all ready, father?" he asked, his voice cold and steady.

The old man nodded assent, and, stooping, Boyd lifted the lifeless shape in his arms, blanket and all, bearing it as easily, as tenderly as ever a mother bore her slumbering babe.

Feeling a strange faintness at his own tough heart, Ambrose Savage noted that tenderness, and turning abruptly away, he strode back to where Dale was standing beside the deep hole they had dug.

"Spread that out, brother," said Boyd, dropping the blanket. "We can lower him by holding the ends."

Without a word Dale obeyed, and Boyd gently lowered his precious burden upon the blanket. Then he knelt down and reverently pressed his cold lips to that marble brow. Rising, he softly said:

"You too, father, brother. I don't reckon it'll make us any softer-minded toward the murderer. And—he would like it—if he knew!"

Awed quite as much by this strange, unusual mood in one whom they had both believed above such human weakness, father and son obeyed.

"That's all—catch hold, Dale. Time is passing, and day is near. We want to be back in the Wigwam before the whole town wakes up!"

Boyd Savage spoke in his usual tones now, all signs of emotion vanishing as though he had never betrayed such weakness. He caught two corners of the blanket at the head of the corpse, but Ambrose pushed his son aside and took the foot himself.

"It's my right. It's the last service I can render him. And he was a good son—the best of all the tribe!" he muttered, his voice husky and far from natural.

"The last—save avenging his foul murder!" rung out the stern voice of his first-born.

Together the two men lowered the body to the bottom of the grave. Boyd folded the blanket over face and figure, then caught up the spade and swiftly flung in the loosened mold.

Before his vigorous arms, the task was soon completed, and when the surface was trampled hard and sifted over with dry stones and gravel, all three fell to scattering the surplus earth.

"The sun will dry it all in an hour, and never a soul but us could even guess what has been hidden from sight between these two rocks!"

"Only for a time—he shall have a more fitting grave before many days!" gloomily muttered the father, wiping his damp brow with a hand that—strange sight!—trembled visibly.

"Only for a time!" echoed Boyd, as he stood with bared head beside the leveled grave. "Only until we can run his murderer down—only until we have avenged him, as well as Arch and Marsh!"

"That needn't be so mighty long," quietly said Dale. "Make Enos Dunbar tell where he rode when he took the Up-grade trail last evening. Make him tell what he was doing last night in the hills. Make him explain how he came and went without your seeing him as you blockaded the trail. Then—there'll be no more Silver Spiders—for us!"

Ambrose Savage roused with a start, tossing back his long locks, looking, acting, speaking far more like his usual self.

"I believe it—I begin to see through all that puzzled me for so long! Enos Dunbar is Wallace Yarrow! He never died! They lied when they told me I was gazing upon his grave!"

"We'll have the whole truth out of his lips before the week is dead," sternly said Boyd, reaching out a hand to each one of his kindred.

"We'll bounce him, and wrest the whole black truth from his lips! Then—join with me, father, brother, as I swear!"

"Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth! Over the murdered form of our loved one we record the oath of vengeance!"

"Amen!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MAN WITH THE SHELLS.

"No opposition 'tended, gents in general an' you in 'ticular," as he made a polite bow to the rather frowning personage behind the bar. "Jest a weenty little bit o' side-show fer a nickel, with the only 'riginal 'rang-a-tang on the outside as blower. Ye needn't come in ef it don't likes ye, fer it only costs double to stay out."

Glibly flowed the words, with a parrot-like utterance that hinted at frequent repetition, but the coveted, off-hand *bonhomie* was sadly marred by that doleful twang, and it required but a single glance at the long face of the speaker to decide him a professional.

Planting his polished staff upright in the floor by means of the spike with which its smaller extremity was provided, the speaker turned a silver band that slipped down and permitted a little table with velvet top to spread itself smoothly open.

"I wouldn't say it if I didn't feel the power, gents an' feller-citizens o' Post Meridian Metropolisville, fer they ain't nothin' comes harder to a modest critter then to blow his own horn out loud whar other people can't help hearin' what it says; but neverthelastin'—"

"Good Lawd!" exploded a dilapidated-looking fellow who had just come from the further side of the dark moreen curtains dividing the saloon

proper from the gambling division. "You hean't got false teeth!"

"Nur false nothin' else," bowed the man with the shells, pausing with those implements in his hands to acknowledge that blunt address. "Wuss luck me! Wuss luck that some o' my troubles an' trials an' tribulations an' miseryation an'—"

"Durnation!"

"—durnation *wasn't* false, fer then I'd be heap more comf'table an' less bored down with keer then I be at this present writin'. An'—I say, sir, boss, your Honor," his voice growing a little more ardent, though it sounded even more hopeless than at first. "You never happened to meet up with a feller that happens to look like me, mebbe?"

"What ye flingin' sech an idee at me fer?" growled the seeming bummer, visibly flinching, one hand stealing into his ragged garments as though in search of a hidden weapon.

"Steady, gents!" sharply warned the bar-keeper. "No rowing in here, or I'll have to call you both!"

"Tie me with a spool o' thread, an' the rest o' ye hold him!" came from the man of the shells in doleful jest. "I'm staggerin' under turrtils bonds fer to keep the peace holy ontel I kin ketch up with the p'izen critter that's kiverin' the good name an' honor an' rep'etation an' on-spotted morals o' Saul Sunday all over a foot high with dirt an'— Billy-be-durned ef jest the tryin' to paint it out in plain tellin' hain't dried up the thrapple o' me so— Come out o' yer nest, Ebenezer, an' say shell I try fer to beat the house out of a snort, or shell I go down into the wault fer to wipe off the cost o' countin' noses?"

With a shake of his left hand, Solemn Saul dropped an ugly yellow object on the velvet table, then sent his bony fingers flying to and fro as he manipulated the little joker and the three shells, droning out his stock phrases the while as an accompaniment.

Nearly all of those assembled in the bar of the Wigwam had heard of the old game of "thimble-rigging," and some of their number had witnessed the working of the modernized version before this; but there was something odd about this stranger of the melancholy pliz and dolorous tones, to say nothing of the peculiar pet just produced: a horned toad in all its repulsive beauty.

For beauty it really possessed, when its curious markings were closely examined, when its brilliant eyes were noted, despite its ugly shape, flattened body, crooked legs, long, tapering tail.

"Do yer bounden duty, Ebenezer, an' ef ye kin rightly see yer way fer to let the old man down easy—so much the better fer yer rations when grub-time comes 'round ag'in! An' so—here she goes an' thar she goes, over an' under, top an' bottom, do-se-do an' sashay all!"

"Don't ye wink twice with the same eye while t'other ain't wide open tight, Ebenezer, fer I'll cleat ye ef I kin. It's part o' the game, an' the way I makes my livin' by keepin' from starvin' to death. Fingers kin shet up eyes, an' motion goes too mighty swift fer lookin' to keep track 'thout gittin' crossways. An' so—whar's the little joker, Ebenezer? P'int it out ef ye kin, but I'm bettin' the house ye can't begin to—Jest my luck, an' I knowed it!"

Not a little to the surprise of the onlookers, the horned toad crept nearer the aligned shells, twisting its pointed nose back and forth, then turning over the middle shell, to instantly swallow the little black ball.

"Whooray fer hurraw!" cried the bummer, flinging his battered tile to the ceiling and meeting it with a vigorous kick that drove it up to his ankle, where it clung like a novel frill. "Bully fer Ebenezer, an' who says Dad Filkins hain't the spunk fer to back up his good judgment? Won ag'in an'—jest shove me a snort as commission, Johnny, an' I'll fall in at the tail-end o' the process when Ebenezer's pap does his shoutin' fer the hull gang!"

"But—not that I'm kickin', pardner, mind ye," hesitated the man with the shells.

"Kickin'?" indignantly echoed the bummer, fairly swelling with indignation at the bare thought. "Didn't I say I'd back Ebenezer fer to ketch the turn, every time? An' didn't he ketch it? An' now—Johnny, git yer gun."

"Waal, ef you say so—"

"Ain't I sayin' so, this three times over already? Shell I raw up the throat o' me jest fer two snorts? Shell I—"

"Shell I goes, an' Ebenezer's winnin' counts," cried Solemn Saul, tossing a double eagle on the bar, feebly smiling and trying to assume the reckless demeanor befitting a thoroughbred who finds himself in such genial company. "Sbingle the house ye stops into, an' ye'll never need to hyste a rumbeller fer to keep the rain from leakin' out o' yer ear when ye retire to bunk! Them's my sentiments, an' I'd back 'em up with a ballid ef it wasn't—ef that p'izen critter that looks like me an' acts so durned awful mighty dif'rent hedn't clean broke the backbone o' my spirits an' knocked all the music o' my system into eeternal miseryation an'—"

"Fer the massy o' holy smoke! somebody choke him off!" gasped Dad Filkins, staring with wildly protruding eyes at that voluble personifi-

cation of endless woe. "Ef I hed the ducats to pay fer gittin' out a model, billy-be-durned ef I wouldn't 'ply fer a patent on 'petual motion!'"

Solemn Saul sighed in meek resignation as he cast a mildly reproachful glance toward the bumper while waiting for the decanter to reach his hand.

"Them that hes must lose, an' them that's never lost nothin' ain't able fer to 'preciate the miseryation o' them that hes. An' sech bein' Gospel truth, I fergive ye, pardner, an' drink a hope that you won't never be no wiser this side o' eternity. I'm lookin' at ye all, gents!"

Emptying his glass at a single gulp, the Sad Man from San Saba pocketed his change and turned back to his little table and Ebenezer.

"You've done your duty, honey, an' bed's ready ef you be!"

Swaying its pointed head to and fro for an instant, the horned frog shuffled forward and crawled out of sight up the loose sleeve of its master's coat, despite the husky plea which Filkins sent forth:

"Cain't he do it more'n once at a time, pardner? Durned ef I ever see me a more curiouser trick then that same, but I'm bettin' it was a clean happen-to-come-so, an' you cain't make him do it over ag'in—not fer no round o' drinks, you cain't."

Saul Sunday was gravely scanning the face and figure of the fellow who addressed him, as though he had found a new type of humanity.

A form of average hight and size, though the picturesque mass of patches and tatters which enveloped him made this last item a matter of speculation rather than certainty. A man who had long passed the turning point of life, judging from his dingy gray hair and scrubby beard, the former falling over his forehead, the latter growing to his very eyes, leaving little more than the end of his highly colored nose and those bleared orbs open to inspection.

About his middle was belted a pair of huge revolvers, rusty as to barrel and cylinder, dented and notched as to butts, kept company by a long-bladed butcher-knife.

On one foot he wore a cowhide boot with gaping toes. On the other was a ragged arctic overshoe.

Taken as a whole, Dad Filkins little resembled the Gamecock called Yellow Pile, who had been one of the party to surprise Saul Sunday and Carl Rank while on their way to P. M. City, the evening before, and if the keen-eyed detective failed to recognize the rascal, surely he can hardly be held to fault.

As for Solemn Saul himself, after having once recovered his burro and struck the stage road, he completed his journey without adventure of note. Either the Gamecocks had abandoned their quest as useless, or he had blundered past their lines unseen and unheard under cover of the night.

"I never bet on a sure thing, sport," gravely said the man with the shells, shaking his head in declination. "Ebenezer don't know how to slip up on it, but the honey is gone to bed fer the night, an' it's bad fer the health fer to git turned out afore reg'lar gittin'-up time. An' so—ef you'd like to play you was he, I don't mind!"

With marvelous swiftness Solemn Saul strung the shells in an even row, blandly waving his hands over the table as he forced a wan smile.

With a rapid motion Dad Filkins picked up one of the shells, only to drop it and start back with a stifled cry as an ugly tarantula waved its hairy claws.

"What the devil—waal, hev I got 'em this soon?"

He stared at the spot where the repulsive insect had lain, but where it was no longer. In its place there rested the little joker.

"Don't gitskeered, pardner, for it's jest a little way I hev. Ebenezer ett up the little joker, an' as I cain't keep shop 'bout it, I hed to ax Jereboam wouldn't he lay me 'nother aig. An' now you see it—now you don't see it!" as he deftly manipulated the shells. "Try it a whack fer love or drink or ducats. Ye cain't win ef ye don't bet, an' ef ye don't resk nothin' I won't hev the wharwith to pay fer my chuck in the mornin' when hungry time comes."

"Don't git skeered off, gents, fer it's jest the most funny weenty swag ye ever tried to crack to git at the rich kernel inside. An' even ef ye lose—which I'm waitin' to bet you will—the fun o' losin' pays fer the trouble, an' lays 'way over the honor o' winnin'."

"An' better then all else: you'll go to bed so mighty comf'table, knowin' that you've bin the humble means o' helpin' a pore, pussycuted critter to win back his ruined repotation an' bu'sted peace o' mind which hes gone to blazes 'long of a p'izen critter that looks like me in all but honor an'—jest le' me ketch a new breath an' I'll tell ye all about it, gents!"

"Don't ye do it—don't let him, gents!" gasped Dad, in affected consternation as he shrunk back with half-averted face. "He'll use up all the atmospheric an' leave us to choke fer want o' wind to swaller! Somebody that's got more dust then narves, bet him a whack an' so save us all—somebody please do!"

"Who's pinching you, Dad?" came a clear, sharp voice from the open doorway as a tall,

graceful and athletic figure made its appearance in the light of the gasoline lamps. "Hav'n't got snakes in your dancing pumps, have you?"

Filkins turned quickly toward the door, to recognize Dale Savage in the newcomer, and with a swift gesture he cried:

"Never a snake, boss, your Honor, but the durndest wind machine you ever see in all your borned days ur nights! Which his name is—"

"Saul Sunday, from San Saba," bowed that worthy, adding pathetically: "Did you ever see my livin' pictur' afore, stranger?"

CHAPTER XXII.

A DANGEROUS STORM BREWING.

DALE SAVAGE made no immediate reply to this query, his big blue eyes roving from head to foot of the flashily garbed sport as though he wanted to be sure before answering.

Even without that clearly enunciated name to guide him, he would have found little difficulty in recognizing the person whose description had been given him by his elder brother, as one of the suspicious parties whom his cunning trap had closed upon the evening before, while blockading the Up-grade road.

Nothing further had been heard of him, since that desperate escape from Shawl-neck and his mate. None of the Gamecocks had seen him, so far as their superiors knew, for Duck-wing had concluded to keep his own counsel and say naught of his capture by the man with the shells.

Now—the fellow was here, at headquarters, playing the part of a crack-brained sport. For what purpose? Had two detectives been sent to that section? Or if only one, had the Silver Spider bitten the innocent, letting the guilty one go free?

All of this flashed with marvelous rapidity through the brain of the younger Savage, and his big eyes caught an ugly light which those who knew him best had learned through sad experience meant mischief.

"Tain't jest beca'se I'm proud o' the looks o' me that I ax it, sir, boss, your Honor," meekly adled Sunday, heaving a sigh that seemed to come from the lower regions. "But you see afore ye the victim of a bitter black cuss! Ye see afore ye the broken down relict o' better days when—but *that* time ain't no more—wuss luck!"

"Is it a conundrum, my dear sir?" softly asked Dale, smiling like an angel. "Or is it just part of the game?" with a glance at the velvet table and its row of shells.

"It's a feller that looks like me, but—"

"I've never had the pleasure of meeting him, sir. If I ever had, I could hardly have let it slip my memory. Such a gentleman is not to be scared up every day in the week."

"Ef you'd hear him git fairly wound up an' set to runnin' down, boss, you'd say that heap more in airnest!" sighed Dad Filkins.

"A hummer right from Buzzville, eh?"

"A blizzard right from Blowtown, ruther!"

Solemn Saul gazed meekly from one to the other, his bony fingers mechanically smoothing the goat-like beard tipping his chin, then venturing to utter:

"A pilgrim from purgatory, steering straight for sheol an' so mighty shek shod that he cain't stop his slippin' funder down hill! Time was—but *now*? Stranger, all that keeps me from lettin' go all hols an' takin' a blind dive into the deepest pits o' eternal despair, is the one faint hope o' some day ketchin' up to the p'izen critter that's stole the name an' face an' callin' of a honest sport fer to scatter him a bad repetition all over the wide world; an' ef—"

"Ef ye let him once get fairly set to goin', boss, it'll take a plum' week fer ye to ketch the last word!" groaned Dad Filkins.

"An' ef I've hed the spine o' me driv' so fur up through the hat o' me by boots that I hed to twist it off to keep from hev'in' a banner run up me fer a flagpole—ef I've done that once, I've done it a clean dozen times!"

"And all because a rascal looks like an honest sport, you say?" blandly queried Dale Savage, moving forward and curiously inspecting the little table and its paraphernalia. "Being a sport, of course you gamble? And gambling, you carry your own game with you?"

"Ef I didn't, how could I hope to make a livin' while folerin' the feller that looks like me?" moaned Solemn Saul, his fingers instinctively beginning to manipulate the shells and little joker. "The brain o' me is too mighty upset fer to 'low of me playin' faro, not to say poker. An' so—here an' thar, bither an' yon—ye see I hev to do the best I know how."

"Your fingers haven't lost their cunning, if you brain has," nodded Savage, after watching their marvelously smooth evolutions.

"The time fer them to feel bairn't come to pass, yit," nodded Saul. "Rut it will—it must! An' then—when they git done feelin', sir, boss, your Honor, that p'izen critter won't never no more look like me!"

"May the fates prosper you in your search say I! But if you hope to pay your way as you go, better hunt up a deeper game than this. Why I could beat it out my own self!"

It was a cunning bait, and though more than

one of those present realized just what lay hidden beneath it, Solemn Saul seemed wholly unsuspecting of brewing danger. And several of those near turned quietly toward the door, only to be checked by the cold tones of Savage:

"Don't be in a hurry, gentlemen, I beg of you. Stop and see how easily a thoroughbred can pull in the persimmons you feared to reach after!"

Though there were brave men among their number, not one cared to openly ignore that request; command they knew it to be, rather. And with grave, uneasy faces they waited and watched for the end.

"That's business," nodded the pilgrim sport a faint light of interest struggling through his melancholy. "An' ef they's any one thing I like better than losin' to a thoroughbred, it's pullin' his ducats to my side o' the table."

"Never a doubt of it, for I've felt that same way my own self," laughed Savage, pulling out a handful of gold coin and tossing a couple of them on the bar as he added: "Plant your table closer to the bar, Sunday, and that'll save a stakeholder."

With growing eagerness the other complied, covering the stake with an equal amount, then picking up the shells and holding them up for inspection.

"It's jest a matter o' form, ye know, sir, boss, your Honor," he meekly smiled. "Nobody'd be sech a p'izen fool as to think o' tryin' to run a rig onto the likes o' you."

"I'd feel sorry fer him—afterwards!"

"But that don't bender me from tellin' ye that, using squar' tools as I do, I'll cheat ye if I kin. It's part o' the game, as mebbe ye know 'bout the tellin'?" somewhat anxiously added Solemn Saul.

"Of course," nodded Dale. "It's your fingers and their quickness, against my eyes and their keenness. Go on with the music, pardner!"

Dropping his customary running fire of phrases, knowing that with the adversary he now confronted, such means could avail nothing in confusing his eyesight or cool judgment, Solemn Saul fell to work, making his bony fingers fly like magic over the velvet square.

Never had he played more accurately, and long practice had rendered him so skillful that, after the first move or two, the shells and the little joker seemed to fly back and forth without being touched. It was as though each finger tip was a magnet, and each shell under their complete control.

"The little joker is—somewhere else!" laughed Dale Savage as he turned up one of the shells. "First blood for you, Sunday!"

"Which is bed and chuck an' a solid drink to make 'em more bindin'," laughed the winner, his eyes twinkling as he picked up the stakes. "Better luck ketch you next time, sir!"

"Bound to," nodded Savage, tossing another sum on the counter. "I never care about taking the first pot. It tastes sweeter the lower you get. Set 'em to dancing again, Sunday. It's worth the money just to look at your hooks playing magic!"

Covering the wager, Sunday again worked the shells, but, if his fingers were as nimble as before, Dale Savage must have sharpened his eyesight, for he promptly uncovered the little joker, and won.

"Told you so, Sunday," with a peculiar laugh, nodding toward the gold on the bar. "I never cash in while the game holds out. Cover the mopuses and butter your fingers for a slicker play than you made last whirl. If you don't, I'll strip you to the buff—sure!"

"Hoss an' hoss, but I cain't let go the hull team, nohow! An' ef I don't talk I cain't play fit to tote swill to swine! So now ye see it an' now ye don't. Up an' down, whirl around, keep it up ontel ye clean dizzy the two lookin' eyes o' the gent! Sight is sharp, but ten times out o' nine fingers kin fool it. Keep a-lookin' all ye know how, fer I'm bound to cheat ye ef I kin! That's the way I make my livin', an' ye cain't 'spect me to go bu'lst through pure friendship. Fer—all set, sir, boss, your Honor, an' I'm layin'—didn't I say so?"

The instant those flying hands ceased to move, Dale Savage knocked over a shell, but the joker was not there. And then the storm burst!

With a stroke of his hand he sent the other shells flying, viciously snarling as he leaped forward and clutched at Sunday's throat:

"You devill! You kept the ball in your hand!"

With a heavy shock the two men fell to the floor, and the others present scattered in wild confusion—to utter wild cries as the gas was turned off, throwing all into utter darkness!

And before they could renew their rush for the door, a voice rung out with deadly clearness:

"Hold! I'll kill the first who tries to pass here! I say it—and my name's Boyd Savage!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

SWORN TO VENGEANCE.

"DRUNK and disorderly, were I the judge before whom we were brought for inspection, Kid," grimly laughed Ambrose Savage. "You do look terribly rocky, youngster, and if you wasn't a boy of mine, I'd almost be tempted to

believe that ugly welt across the phiz o' you meant a cowhiding!"

Father and son were again seated in the private chamber above the bar and gambling saloon, and now, as at their former interview, the younger man seemed far from being at his ease.

Four-and-twenty hours had gone by since then. It was wearing well along in the evening, and with a faint, indistinct murmur sounds came through the floor from the saloon below.

Four-and-twenty hours! That space of time had aged both Ambrose Savage and his youngest son, Eno Savage, by half as many years, to judge from their worn and haggard faces, their sunken eyes and loss of color.

All the blood which had given the young man such a healthful color had seemingly settled in that purple wale, crossing his face diagonally, rendering him so marked an object that it was no wonder Ambrose Savage should make allusion to that significant brand.

"Did you force me here simply to jeer at my face, sir?"

"Your face is right enough, though you might have painted it a little more gracefully, Kid. As for insulting you—not this night, of all nights! Not now, when what are left of the Savages ought to be nearer and dearer, tougher and truer to the tribe than ever before!"

Eno Savage gave a little start, his eyes lifting to rest on that grimly handsome face, with mingling curiosity and awe tingling through his veins.

What had brought that unusual tremor into the voice of the old man? Never before had he noticed it so unsteady, so full of weakness, so nearly pathetic as now.

"Something has happened, father?" he asked, hesitatingly. "The boys have had some fresh trouble?"

"Something *has* happened, Kid, but—I hardly know whether to tell you just what, after having lugged you here by the nape of the neck, as 'twere. If I only knew—if you were more of a Savage!"

Ambrose threw back his head, shaking his yellow mane until it flew out in a cloud behind him. The action seemed to bring back his old nature, and with a short, ugly laugh he leaned his arms on the table which had split beneath his iron fist at their former interview, fixing his great eyes keenly, almost fiercely upon that marked face.

"You ought to be Savage, for you've got part of you war-paint on, Kid! Better keep close to the Wigwam for a few days, or some fool rascal will be asking how come ye so!"

"Time enough to answer them when they begin to ask questions, sir. It wasn't through your mighty interest in me or my affairs that led you to bring me here. What have you to tell me about the boys, sir?"

"Do you remember—you can't have forgotten all about Archer and Marsh, Kid. You can't have forgotten how they left this world."

Eno Savage started, turning a shade paler than before, a look of horror leaping into his dark eyes as he huskily panted:

"Not—you don't mean that—not again, father?"

"For the third time, Kid," speaking with painfully forced calmness. "And this time the Silver Spider picked the flower of the flock!"

"Not—not Clay, father?"

Ambrose Savage nodded his head in assent. Hard, tough, reckless as he prided himself upon being, just at that moment he preferred not to trust his tongue.

Eno bowed his face upon his hands, shivering silently. Though for years—ever since he came into possession of that tear-stained legacy left him by his sainted mother—he had felt an alien among his brethren, he could not bear of this frightful death unmoved. For Clay had been the most like a brother to him.

Only for a brief space did this weakness last. Then he lifted his head, his eyes aglow, his voice almost harsh in its sternness as he spoke:

"Tell me how it happened, father. Or—first—can't we run this devil down? Is there no way by which we can find and punish him as he deserves?"

"You'd take a hand in, Kid?"

"Try me!"

"No matter who the find might chance to be?"

"No matter—just so the proof was positive, father."

"Give me your hand, boy—so!" and their fingers closed across the table. "Swear it with me, boy. Take oath to avenge your murdered brothers, even as I vow to punish the foul assassins of my gallant lads. Swear it by all you hold most holy—swear it by the grave that holds the bones of your sainted mother, Eno!"

"May she frown upon and disown me as a son, if I fail to play a brother's part in hunting this devil from the face of the earth!"

Clear, distinct, measured fell the words, and for a moment Ambrose Savage forgot what had so cruelly marked that pale face opposite, forgot what he had so often sneered at as effeminacy that only fell short of positive cowardice in this, his latest born.

"I recognize my son now, Kid," he laughed, dropping that sinewy band and leaning back in his seat with a satisfied breath. "I feared to find a cuckoo, but you're true hawk, after all!"

"How did it happen? And when? What have you done with—where is—it?"

"Last night, maybe about the same hour in which I was trying to read you a lecture, Kid—little I thought it, then!"

"How? Tell me all, father."

Ambrose Savage gazed keenly into the face of his son, frowning a bit as he read therein the knowledge which he had once hoped to keep entirely from his youngest, since threats, coaxing and arguments had all failed to win him over to their side.

"All right, Kid," with a gloomy nod. "You know how we are fixed. You know that we're doing crooked work, off and on."

"To my sorrow, sir, I know it."

"Well, we can't afford to quarrel over that old point, to-night. I had to bring it up or you couldn't understand just how—how the deed was done."

"I've thought best to keep it from you, Kid, but for some little time past the rest of us have suspected underhand plotting against us and the plant, up at the Den. And when word came from reliable quarters that one of those infernal bloodhounds—a detective—was coming our way to nose about, of course we had to hustle, lively!"

"I feared something of the sort, for—"

"How?" sharply demanded the old man, his hands clenching. "Who gave you the hint? Out with it, Kid, or I'll—"

"I only guessed something was going wrong, from the faces of the boys, sir. If wrong—wasn't it easy to make a guess?"

"I didn't know but what you'd picked up a word from—never mind," cutting the sentence short. "The word was reliable, and the lads acted upon it, last night. Of course they couldn't trust *you* in any such work, so I took care to hold you busy."

If he expected a comment on this revelation, none came. And he resumed, speaking more rapidly:

"Boyd had charge of the Gamecocks, of course, being the eldest, but Clay went along as his second—worse luck! And they blockaded the Up-grade trail. Mark that down in your mind, Kid! They set the trap early in the afternoon, and not a living soul could have passed either way without their knowledge until far along in the night. Even after they had bagged their game—"

"They caught—"

"Yes," with a grim nod. "They caught the hound; two of them, for that matter. And even when they had their game, Boyd left a trusty guard watching the road. Mark that again, Kid, for I'll hark back to it after a little, and show you why I dwell on that fact."

"Then—Clay felt too much out of sorts to play a part in what was to follow, so he took charge of the horses. And—that devil found him there!"

Almost fiercely checking Eno with a gesture as the young man was about to speak, Ambrose Savage told how Dad Filkins discovered the Silver Slayer's victim, and told of all that followed.

With fixed muscles, but with a face almost ghastly in its pallor, Eno listened to that black recital, his grief for the loss of his half-brother by such awful means, almost overpowered by his horror at the no less foul murder of the detective.

Ambrose Savage told how word came to him and Dale; told of their wild ride through the night, of the tragic sight which awaited their arrival, of the burial under the moonlight and the solemn oath which formed the only burial-service.

"The lads never thought of counting you in as one of the avengers, Kid, but I kept you in mind. I felt that you were a true Savage at heart, and so—you've taken the oath by your mother's grave, boy!"

"I have; and I'll keep it inviolate. Only give me a clew to the devilish assassin, and see if I am a man!"

"The clew is not lacking, Eno Savage," and that voice grew hard and vindictive in its triumph. "The assassin lives in this very town! He is one of the richest, most respected citizens of this, our home! He is the very devil whose whip marked your face so deeply, Kid!"

Eno started back with a choking cry of doubting horror, only to flush hotly as he panted:

"Not—it cannot be, father!"

"It can be, for it is Gospel truth, boy!"

"Her—I can't, I won't believe it! There's some frightful error in this clew—or it's a dastardly trick to cheat me out of my love! And not even you—"

"Keep your seat, you lovelorn idiot!" growled Savage, hoarsely. "Sit down again and hear me through, or I'll kill you with my own hand! Ay! if you're cur enough to break your solemn oath—on the grave of the mother who died to give you life—I'd stamp my likeness from your baby face with my heel!"

With a shivering groan Eno Savage dropped back into his seat, covering his face with his trembling hands.

He could not believe it, even yet. Enos Dunbar the Silver Slayer? Her father the vilest of all assassins? It could not be true!

And yet, that sacred oath of his. Hardly dry on his lips.

"Proof—give me your proof, father," he buskily muttered.

"That's what I brought you here for, Kid," resuming his usual tone and manner. "That's why I bade you mark well what precautions were taken by Boyd to keep the Up-grade trail blockaded."

"You know that Enos Dunbar rode out of town last evening long after the boys had the trail guarded. You know he took the Up-grade road, for his girl told you as much. And you know when he came back home, as well as what followed his return."

Eno caught his breath, then covered that burning brand with his unsteady fingers once more.

"Mighty plain, his signature, eh?" harshly laughed Savage. "Dale was on guard, and he saw it all. 'Stop!' with a black scowl as Eno gave a start of angry surprise. 'It was by my orders, mind you, for though I had no positive proof then, I felt that Dunbar was scheming against the tribe. Because he didn't want you to carry off his girl, I thought, at first; now I know the black-hearted devil better!'"

"I can't—you're wronging him, father!" cried Eno, desperately fighting against that hideous dread, but before he could say more, the gas-lights went out, leaving them in utter darkness.

And from underneath their feet rose wild, savage sounds, causing the giant to leap erect with a curse of rage and fury.

"Come—there's trouble down-stairs, Kid!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

SAUL SUNDAY IN A TIGHT BOX.

AMBROSE SAVAGE was quite right when he said there was trouble down in the saloon beneath his feet, but even he could have formed no idea of how tragic that trouble was to prove.

The lights went out, turned off by some unsuspected hand, just as Dale Savage bore Saul Sunday backward to the floor, his muscular fingers closing about the throat of the man with the shells.

And the frightened stampede toward the wide door was checked instantly by Boyd Savage, whose fierce threat rung clearly above the wild confusion.

Then—as suddenly and as mysteriously as they had gone out, the gas-lights flared once more, revealing a thrilling sight.

Saul Sunday was just crawling free of his assailant, half-stunned by the fall, his collar torn open, his neck bleeding from that savage grip.

Dale Savage lay on his side, motionless as though—*was it death?*

Boyd Savage glared at his brother, each hand gripping a revolver, holding the entrance against all.

But it was left for Dad Filkins to make the awful discovery—it was his hoarse, almost choking voice that gasped forth:

"*God above! look—the Silver Spider!*"

Just then Boyd Savage caught sight of the hideous image—clinging tightly to the left temple of his brother—reflecting the rays of the lamp-light. And with a choking gasp of mingled horror, rage and grief, he dropped his pistols and staggered forward.

Only to be hurled aside by the arm of a giant, as Ambrose Savage dashed up, dropping to his knees by the side of his son, panting:

"Dale—lad, wake up! You're not—Ye lie, devils!" flashing his scorching gaze around the room, over those pale, awe-stricken faces. "He isn't dead! He can't be dead, when only last night—Dale, my boy, my youngest, my pride, look up and tell me—"

A wild, horrible cry cut his words short as he caught sight of the Silver Spider, and he shrunk back, almost falling, saved but by the ready support of Dad's arm.

"Look to him, boss!" the seeming bummer hoarsely uttered, resigning his charge to Eno, then leaping to the door, catching up the pistols let drop by Boyd in his horror. "Back, gents, one an' all! I'll blow ye through ef ye tempt fer to skin out o' this afore ye show clean hands! Somebody made that spider bite—who was it?"

Saul Sunday had mechanically caught up his staff and closed its table, falling back along the bar until he stood close to the beer-cooler. His action was purely mechanical thus far, for his senses had been sadly scattered by that vicious attack and heavy fall. For, though he had partly anticipated something of the sort, he had not looked for actual trouble so soon, nor in that precise shape.

But now he began to realize his peril, as Dad Filkins uttered that last question. Though perfectly innocent, he knew suspicion would almost certainly turn upon him. And—his face paled despite his acknowledged nerve, at the thought of being put to the test.

For in his pocket, wrapped up in cloth and a bit of blanket, was the fac-simile of that poisoned bug!

"Ay! who was it?" echoed Eno Savage, swift-

ly glancing over the people present, and feeling a great relief as he failed to recognize the face or figure of Enos Dunbar. "Who was fighting with Dale?"

"Him, yender, by the winder!" sharply cried Filkins, covering the man of the shells with one of his pistols.

"Then he's got to show—"

"Sufferin' grandpap!" gasped Solemn Saul, shrinking from those fiery looks for an instant, lifting his staff as though its slender diameter could shield his body from pistol bullets.

That shrinking was purely involuntary, but he recognized how unfortunately it might be interpreted, and instantly rallied, putting on the boldest front possible, though he knew that only a miracle could save him if he should be overpowered; that Silver Spider in his keeping would be taken as proof irrefragable of his guilt.

"I call Heaven to b'ar witness that I never done it, gents!" he declared, his voice clear and frank. "I never laid the weight o' my fingertip on the gent. Fer he downed me so mighty quick I never knowed he was doing of it ontel it was all over!"

An ugly sound came from those assembled, and more than one eager hand clutched butt or haft of a deadly weapon. All the more readily, perhaps, because they felt their own lives would be safer when the deed was securely fastened on some other.

"Hold, all!" sternly cried Boyd Savage, recovering something of his usual decision of character after that awful shock—the second one which he had been called upon to bear up under during a single four-and-twenty hours.

"I'm a holdin', boss, sir, your Honor!" came from Solemn Saul. "As true as they's a Heaven over us all this night, I never done the foul deed! Mebbe— They was a couple o' two critters slipped out past ye when ye made a break, jest then!"

This was true, though Sunday hoped for little benefit from that fact, for it was more than likely he alone had noted the figures stealing out of the saloon. Still, time was very precious, and the more seconds he could win, the better chance he would have for studying up some scheme by which he might escape being searched before he could dispose of that terrible spider.

"Is that true? Did you see them, Dad?" demanded Boyd, turning toward the man guarding the door.

An answer was not immediately forthcoming. Possibly Filkins was not sure. Perhaps he felt so confident that Saul Sunday was none other than the assassin who had pressed the Death Spider to the temple of the man whose fingers were threatening to tear his throat open, that he hated to give him even so small a chance for escaping a just punishment.

"Speak, curse you!" viciously cried Boyd, his clinched fist rising as though he would bound forward and smite those reluctant lips.

"An' tell the plain truth, pardner, ef ye don't want the life of a innocent man on the tongue o' ye!" eagerly, earnestly added Sunday, feeling how much might depend on that answer.

"They was one or two—mebbe more, boss," slowly muttered Dad Filkins, lowering his weapons, but still maintaining his position before the open doorway.

"You are sure of that?"

"Dead sure, sir," more frankly. "I wasn't 'zactly lookin' that way at the time, but I kin take oath they was some on 'em skun out when you drapped your guns."

"Who were they?"

"Now you've got me! Who's missin'? Who kin tell that by countin' up noses?"

One or two names were mentioned, and at least one indignant denial flashed forth by the owner of a pronounced name, all of which helped to cover Saul Sunday and his keen, swift, yet covert glances.

As already stated, he had caught up his staff, and backed to the end of the bar, where stood a huge wooden cooler, used for keeping beer kegs under cover. And Dad Filkins had spoken of a window, when denouncing the man with the shells as being he with whom Dale Savage had been struggling.

That window opened on an alley, was small in size, with two ordinary sashes, each containing six small panes of glass. Outside this, all was dark.

So much Saul Sunday had time to learn while that noisy dispute was taking place, and though he made no sign, he slowly edged a little closer to the window.

Ambrose Savage had partially recovered from the terrible shock which the sight of that Death Spider had given him, and shaking off the hand of his living son, he shuffled on his knees to the side of his dead child.

He seemed lost to all else just then. He bent forward until his face almost touched that hideous emblem of vengeance, a husky moan escaping his lips, as his dimmed eyes noted those rude carvings.

"W.—4.—Y."

It was true! The Silent Slayer had dealt his bruised and bleeding heart one more stroke. Another—one more gallant son foully murdered! One more sacrifice to a guilty sire!

"Silence!" cried Eno Savage, sternly. "Time enough to accuse the absent when the ones present have fully cleared their skirts of this horrible crime! And you, my man," striding forward, and reaching out a hand to arrest the man with the shells. "Step to the front, and let's see what we can find upon your person to—"

With a lightning-like motion, Saul Sunday swung his staff around and knocked Eno back. Then, doubling up like a ball, he shot through the window, feet foremost.

CHAPTER XXV.

SAUL SUNDAY FINDS AN ALLY.

It was necessarily a "leap in the dark," but it at least afforded a chance of escape with life, while Saul Sunday knew that were he to submit to search and have that Silver Spider found in his possession, his death would be sure.

If he escaped being lynched by the outsiders, the savages would certainly murder him.

Striking the junction of the two sash, shooting his feet downward as well as outward, the desperate man shattered the frames and cleared a passage for his body.

The resistance was sufficient to destroy his balance, and turning partly over as he shot into the gloom which hung over the narrow alley, the detective had just time enough to wonder how many limbs would be broken by his fall, before he struck heavily against something elastic.

Something of flesh and blood as he instantly knew, but whether human or beast, horse, cow or man, he had no time to even guess before a nervous grasp closed upon his throat as he struck the ground in very close connection with another fellow.

"Hush! I'm a friend!"

So rapidly that it sounded like a single word, though sweetly intelligible to Saul Sunday as it entered his ear, and then that grip on his throat relaxed as the stranger so curiously encountered, actually assisted the detective to his feet.

"Run for it!" came in that same friendly tone, and a strong hand closed upon Sunday's arm, urging him away from the window, heading down the alley instead of venturing out into the less dark street.

A hoarse, vindictive cry came to their ears. For a single instant the light coming through the window was cut off, then a human being sprung through the opening—to sink down in a quivering heap as the unknown dealt him a swift blow with Saul Sunday's staff.

"Take it—now legs save necks!"

Hardly recovered from the shock of his fall within and collision without, Saul Sunday mechanically accepted his staff, and joined his mysterious ally in a rapid flight past the rear of the Wigwam.

"Do as I do and you're all right, Sunday!" came warningly from the lips of his leader as he leaped over a low fence guarding the back of the Savage building, instead of keeping further along the alley.

Saul Sunday obeyed, for even yet he was fitter to follow than to lead, though his limbs were agile enough, and his wits were slowly recovering their wonted keenness.

"As a proof of this, he was beginning to wonder who and what this curiously found ally could be?"

"He knows my name. He was watching me through the window. He lent me a hand when—what for?"

Could it be—was he one of the men who had slipped out of the Wigwam when Boyd Savage left a way open in his horror at discovering the work of the Silver Slayer?

And if so, could he possibly be the merciless demon whose skill had fashioned and whose hand had applied those hideous Death Spiders?

"You devil—was it you?" broke fiercely from his lips as Saul Sunday gripped his ally by an arm, whirling him about so that they stood face to face. "Did you do that? Did you kill him?"

"No more than you did, Sunday!" came the prompt answer. "Don't be a fool, man! Would I have helped you so far if—Ha!"

Another outburst came to their ears, and breaking away from the grip of the detective, grown irresolute at the blunt frankness, the stranger crouched low in the shadows as he stole rapidly away through the night.

Saul Sunday followed close upon his heels, actuated by a double purpose. He was anxious to escape from the Savages and their gang, but he was almost as deeply interested in finding out who and what was this stranger, with the precise part he had played in that night's dark tragedy.

Despite that renewed outcry from or near the window ruined by the man with the shells, there came nothing to show that actual search was being made for the fugitive, not a little to the surprise of both men.

"Keep your eyes open, Sunday," warned the stranger. "The Savages don't loose their grip so mighty easy as all this looks. They're laying some sort of trap for us—ten to one on it!"

"Then they've some reason for wanting to pull you, too?"

"Haven't I lent you a helping hand, man?"

"And acted as a cushion to break my fall when I mistook that window for the regular opening—you did, for a fact."

"Yet you look on me with suspicion. Is that exactly generous or fair, my dear fellow?"

"To be continued—after we've put a little more ground between the Wigwam and our precious carcasses."

"Good as wheat!"

Under this flag of truce the two men resumed their flight, picking their way through the night until at a fairly respectable distance from the Wigwam. Once more in an open street, the stranger slipped a hand through the arm of the detective, quietly saying:

"You're all right, so far, Sunday. If those fellows really set out in chase, they're making a still hunt for their game, and while you keep your eyes open, your show is equal to that of the best in the gang."

"And yours?"

"Oh, I don't count," with an easy laugh. "I just happened around when you wanted somebody to show you a way out of the wilderness, and of course I played the part of good Samaritan. How could I help it?"

Saul Sunday pressed that arm close to his side, holding the light speaker prisoner, after a fashion, then turning squarely about so as to expose his face to the full light of the moon.

The stranger made no attempt to resist. If anything, he seemed to invite that inspection, tipping his head back a little to receive those silvery rays more fairly.

"Maybe not quite as handsome as you'd like, pardner, but it's the best I've got," he laughed, easily, seeming to enjoy that searching gaze.

"You'd look a little more natural with that beard off, I'm thinking, though," nodded Sunday, with equal coolness.

"Really?" with an echo of genuine surprise in his voice.

"I'm not a barber, but I'll agree to leave you with a face smooth as the back of my hand in two seconds; and I'll use no lather, and never a razor at that," added the detective.

"A sort of miracle worker, from that. Well, what do you make out of it anyway, Sunday?"

"You were in the saloon. You were one of those who slipped out when the racket grew hot. Of course you had pressing business that called you away, but—I'd heap rather know what your business was in the Wigwam, when the lights went out!"

The detective put a strong emphasis on those five words, but without lifting his tones high enough to reach other ears. His meaning could not be mistaken, but the stranger showed no signs of uneasiness.

"You mean when that bug—spider, whatever you choose to call it—was taking hold of young Savage, of course?"

"Some one put it there. I'll take oath I never. Can you say as much, stranger?"

"I can, and take Bible oath to that effect. I'm not in the poisoning line, though—Sunday?"

"You say it!"

"Seems to me you've changed your manner of speech most remarkably since taking that header through the window. Seems to me you're more wolf than lamb, more—shall I whisper it? You're a detective!"

"What's that? Something good to eat?"

Sunday relaxed his grip and permitted that hand to go free. He stepped back a pace, ready for action, for anything save letting this mysterious fellow slip clean through his fingers before he had found out just who and what he really was.

"Did you ever hear the story of John Morgan, my dear fellow?"

Sunday swiftly lifted a hand, not to strike a blow, but to make a peculiar motion with his fingers. And the stranger followed with another signal, laughing softly as he spoke again:

"I felt almost certain of it, my dear sir, but I couldn't afford to make too rash a break. I'm John Morgan—for the present."

"And I'm the man you sent for. I've got your letter, with other documents, in a grip at my hotel. I sent them by stage rather than carrying them on my person, for reasons which I'm ready to explain when you can spare time to hear them. Shall we take a walk that way?"

"Time enough for that in the morning. Do you see that house?"

Saul Sunday promptly nodded in the affirmative.

"We'll go there instead. Provided, of course, that you are satisfied I'm the man I claim to be."

"I reckon you're the pure quill. You had the name and the signs all pat. If you stole them—well, I've broken traps before now, and yours will only add one more to the score."

"Break my pate with it, if I try to turn an illegal trick, my dear fellow," softly laughed the other, slipping a hand through the arm of the detective and leading him through the gate, up to the front door.

The building was dark, save where a subdued light shone through one curtained window, but the stranger did not pause to rap for admittance, producing a key and silently unlocking the door.

"Will you wait until I can show a light, or—"

"I'll follow you."

Crossing the hall, a door was opened, leading into the room where the light was burning. Promptly turning this higher, the stranger motioned Sunday to a seat, turning back to close and fasten the door.

The detective swiftly glanced around him, taking in the details of his surroundings with trained skill. An office, library, smoking-room, lounging-place combined, was his immediate decision.

"My snuggery, Mr. Sunday," bowed his host, adding, easily: "That is your name, I believe?"

"That is my name—for the occasion, at least," was the equally cool response. "And yours is John Morgan?"

"It was—for the occasion. It is now Enos Dunbar, and as Enos Dunbar abhors superfluous hair on his face, suppose we dispense with this ugly disguise?"

As he uttered the words, Dunbar removed his wig and beard which had so completely altered his face, tossing it on the center-table.

"I'd put it in a safer place than that, if I were you, Mr. Dunbar."

"Why so?"

"Well, in case search should be made for the persons who stole out of the Wigwam when the bars fell down, you might have to answer some mighty unpleasant questions if that mask was found. And, by the way, would you think me impertinent if I were to ask just why you took a walk in such a hurry?"

Dunbar laughed softly, though a quick glow leaped into his eyes as he listened.

"Possibly for much the same reason that made you spoil a window in getting out of the den, Saul Sunday!"

"Reason enough, then!" grimly laughed the detective as he slipped one hand into his bosom, bringing forth a bundle tied up with a bit of string. "My reason can speak for itself, as you'll be at no loss to understand when I've emptied this—see!"

Untying the string, Saul Sunday removed a ragged corner of blanket. Inside this was a folded handkerchief, which he laid gently on the table before turning back its doubled corners.

When he did this, there shone dully an oblong, or bean-shaped object, the sight of which drew a quick cry from the lips of Enos Dunbar.

"The Silver Spider!"

Saul Sunday gingerly rolled the object over, letting it rest back uppermost, showing the two letters and the single figure carved on it.

"That killed at least two men; I didn't want to be the third!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

SHARING HIS SECRETS.

FOR a single breath Enos Dunbar stared at the Silver Spider like one under a spell, his face very pale, his eyes protruding, his hands tightly clinched.

He seemed unconscious of the keen, searching look with which Saul Sunday watched him, or of the dark suspicion which was taking growth in the detective's brain.

He rose from his feet and came to the table, bending over to the more clearly make out those rude symbols.

"It is the same—it is like the thing I saw on his face!"

"Then you were out in the hills last night, Mr. Dunbar?" quickly asked the detective, his eyes never more keen and searching than they were then as he noted that sudden start and catching of the breath.

"Out in the hills? Last night?" muttered Dunbar, brushing a hand across his brow, but then rallying, forcing a laugh as he resumed his seat. "What makes you ask that question, Sunday?"

"Possibly because I wanted an answer, but never mind now," a grim smile flitting across his gaunt face.

"Why shouldn't I give a frank answer to a blunt query? I was out in the hills, last night, and to explain my presence there is one of the reasons why I invited you here, to-night."

"Of course I'm ready to listen," nodded Saul, refolding the handkerchief and covering the ugly image from the sight. "You sent for me to come here, to work under your orders, I understand."

"I sent for a shrewd detective, and you doubtless came in answer to that call," bowed Dunbar. "May I ask why you neglected to report at once?"

"For the all-sufficient reason that I didn't know where or to whom I was to report."

"Good enough!" leaning forward and reaching a hand across the table. "I hardly doubted you, but with so much at stake I couldn't help asking one more proof. It was barely possible one of my letters might have fallen into wrong hands, but both couldn't have gone the same way. Now I can talk to you freely!"

"The freer you talk, the easier I can do your work, Mr. Dunbar."

"Was it pure chance that carried you to the Wigwam, Sunday?"

"Not exactly. I had to do something to kill

time, and give my unknown employer a chance to show me the sign, of course," was the evasive reply.

"And that—the spider?" with an involuntary shiver as his eyes turned toward the handkerchief lying on the table. "Where did you happen across that hideous thing?"

"I'd rather hear your story first, if you've no objections, sir."

Enos Dunbar shifted his gaze to that face, but if he hoped to learn aught from inspecting it, he was doomed to disappointment. The Sphinx itself could not have been more emotionless.

"All right, Sunday," sinking back in his seat and resuming his wonted manner, speaking after a business fashion very different from what he had betrayed since first catching sight of that Death Spider. "I'll tell you just how the case stands, and just what I hope to bring to pass through your assistance."

"You have seen something of the Savage family. It was one of the sons you had that little racket with, to-night. Another son held the door until the lights flashed out again, and the sight of that spider broke down his nerve. It was the father who knelt by the dead son, and his last-born who tried to arrest you just before you jumped out of the window to plump upon my shoulders."

"I've marked them one and all, sir. Of course they have something to do with your case, else you wouldn't take so much trouble in calling the roll."

"Good!" with a nod of approval. "You're keen, and I'm glad to see as much. They have all to do with the case in hand."

"I heard of the tribe, long before I came into actual contact with them here in P. M. City. They were evil then, they are evil now. A curse to the town, a blight to the country, a foul blot on humanity!"

"You paint them in mighty black colors, sir!"

"Not a tithe as black as they are in reality, though I haven't time to do that, even if I possessed the skill. But generalities go for little with men of your profession, and I'll get down to particulars."

"For a year past I've felt morally certain that the Savage tribe, from eldest to youngest, have been playing road-agent in this vicinity, being in fact, head and front of the lawless gang known as the Mountain Gamecocks."

"I've heard something about them," dryly observed Sunday. "And you sent for me to cut their combs?"

"If you can," with a grim nod. "They'll fight as wicked as though they were true-bred fowls, no doubt, but if you can get the best of them, you'll win enough to pay for all trouble and risks, even with the rewards which are offered for each rascal, dead or alive."

"Maybe you don't know it, but it's a fact that the head of the boldest, most skillful and extensive counterfeiting gang that ever gave the Secret Service cause for worry, is believed to be somewhere out here in the West, though the bills are almost altogether floated in the East."

"I know something about that, of course," with a nod. "You think your friends of the Wigwam are interested in this, too?"

"I am almost positive they are the chief movers in it all!" Dunbar quickly replied, his eyes glowing with strong hatred for the family whom he was denouncing. "I believe I can tell you, within the radius of a very few miles, where to look for the place in which all the secret work is done; from engraving down to printing and signing the notes!"

Only a man with nerve as thoroughly under control as Saul Sunday held his, could have heard that announcement without an outburst of grim delight. And even he showed by his glittering eyes how important he held this information—providing it could be proved true.

"You spoke of my being out in the hills last night," resumed Enos Dunbar, calming down a little when he saw how quietly the detective received his declaration. "How you guessed that I'm at a loss to know, but it is true. I was in the hills, trying to more precisely locate the counterfeiters' den, but without discovering anything of moment."

"You were mighty lucky!"

"How so?" with a quick frown.

"In not being discovered yourself. The Gamecocks were out in full feather, last night, and—well, I found that little curiosity in the hills," with a glance toward the hidden spider. "And I heard one of the Gamecocks crow out that the Silver Spider had bitten one Boss Clay. Can you locate the gentleman?"

"What? Not—not Clay Savage?" harshly ejaculated Dunbar, his face blanching afresh, but an almost vicious triumph leaping into his eyes as he waited for an answer.

Was he acting? Was he learning of that third victim of the Death Spider for the first time?

Saul Sunday asked himself these questions, but he found them very hard to answer satisfactorily.

"I can't swear to the gentleman's identity. All I know is what I've already told you. Still—if I were in your shoes, Mr. Dunbar, I'd take mighty good care that no other person in P. M.

City learned of that little scouting trip through the hills last night!"

"Strangel!" muttered Dunbar, bowing his head on a hand. "Strange that I should not have met or heard anything of them!"

"And mighty lucky, as I hinted before," nodded Sunday. "Stranger as I am to them all, and innocent of all evil, as a matter of course, I had a narrow squeak for life at their hands. Then you can give a guess as to the show you'd have stood for your life had you fallen into their clutches."

Dunbar looked the interest he felt in this statement, and Sunday gave a brief but clear account of his experience with the Gamecocks, save that he made no mention of Carl Rank and his sad fate.

Dunbar listened with interest, asking where he found the spider, but the detective was not quite ready to tell him all, as yet, and made fatigue his excuse for reserving that part of the narrative.

"Pardon me for my forgetfulness, Sunday, but I feel such an overpowering interest in all that concerns the Savage family. You will sleep here to-night, of course."

"I thought of going to the hotel."

"That's out of the question. They'll look for you there, first off. You must stay here and—if you had a more ordinary face and figure!" frowning a bit as he glanced over that peculiar person.

"Don't borrow trouble on my account, dear sir," laughed Sunday as he secured the Silver Spider and rose to his feet. "I don't go much on disguises, but if necessary I can make up to fool my own mother—if I was blessed with such a treasure!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

A VAIN DEFENSE.

IT was fortunate for Eno Savage, perhaps, that he had Saul Sunday so nearly cornered, else that stroke of the staff might have fairly cracked his skull, for the man with the shells had no time to measure the force of his blow.

Even as it was, the youngest Savage was driven back, to trip and fall at full length over the kneeling figure of his father, who, up to that time, had given thought to nothing save the death of his son.

Even more completely unmanned, Boyd Savage had stood like one petrified in his tracks, stupidly staring from that awful emblem to the pale face of the accused, then back again, shivering violently each time he caught the reflected light from the Silver Spider.

But when Eno staggered back, half-stunned by that blow, and Saul Sunday whirled about to leap through the window into the alley, the spell was broken, and he followed after with a choking roar. To be laid senseless by Enos Dunbar before he could fairly recover his footing.

"Boss—wait fer yer guns!" cried Dad Filkins, starting toward the window, but then halting as though recalling his self-appointed position as doorkeeper. "Durn an' double durn the luck to—what kin a critter do, boss?"

"Catch him—hold him!" gasped Eno, staggering to his feet but swaying with a dizziness, trying to clear his eyes by dashing a hand repeatedly across them. "A thousand—light up—"

He took a blind step forward, then reeled and fell headlong.

"Hold!" thundered Ambrose Savage, springing to his feet, lifting a clinched hand in fierce command. "There has been one murder committed here to-night—let not another come through me or mine!"

"You—this from you—his father?"

Eno lifted his head, unsteadily rising to his knees, pointing a trembling hand at the ghastly vision before him as he spoke.

"That devil—take him, dead or alive, if ye be men!"

"Take him alive, and hold him for trial!" sternly added Ambrose, his voice ringing out clear and cold, his face hard-set and white almost as that of his son on whose temple that Silent Slayer was still fastened. "If guilty, who should punish him but me—who but the father of his last victim? Take him—but take him alive!"

That was enough to rapidly clear the saloon, some of the men hot to take the trail, others thinking more of vacating a place where such weird horrors were possible.

Dad Filkins was the first man out, but he only ran to the dark space beneath the shattered window, coming in contact with Boyd Savage who was just recovering from that crushing blow.

"Stiddy! Don't run us down, cuss ye fer mole-eyed jacks!" the bummer snarled, viciously striking out at the excited fellows who had followed his lead. "It's the boss—Boyd Savage—an' I'm dub'us he's ketched it—ketched it bad!"

Pressing one of the men into service, Dad Filkins half-carried, half-led his master out of the alley and into the saloon. Ambrose Savage met them at the door, silently lending his support to his first-born, but coldly signing the others back.

"I'll look after my boy. Leave us alone for a time. You can do no good here. Try and find that man, if you really want to serve us."

"He ain't—you ain't so mighty bad hurt, boss?" anxiously asked Dad, lingering at the door.

"Hurt—who hit me?" unsteadily uttered Boyd, straightening up and fixing his hair back with that characteristic toss.

"It's only a thump—no bones broken," curtly said Ambrose, his finger-tips showing red where they had probed that scalp-wound.

As he spoke thus, he pushed Boyd inside, closing the doors Dad Filkins and the few others who had lingered there, left on the outside.

Besides the three relatives of the silent figure lying on the floor, only one other—the bar-keeper—remained inside the Wigwam. To him Ambrose Savage called, bidding him look after Boyd, but his services were rudely rejected.

"It's nothing—I'm all right! One drink, and—hello, Kid?"

"Can we do nothing, brother?" huskily asked Eno, shivering afresh as he glanced at that victim of a horrible vengeance. "Make father—he must listen to reason!"

"I'll show you all the reasons you care for, Kid, never you fret," harshly interjected the old man, flashing a swift glance toward the bar-keeper. "Johnny, go see if the other room is clear. Look in the corners, under the tables—look close, mind you!"

The man hurried beyond the curtains, looking as though he wished himself well out of the building, and then the giant hurriedly said:

"Button your lips until I say talk, lads. I've got good reasons for it, you may depend."

"And that devil—Saul Sunday, as he calls himself?"

"Will be on hand as soon as we can get ready to attend to him. Now, play to my lead, or I'll break you in two across my knee!"

His keen ears caught the steps of the bar-keeper coming back, to report the gambling-hall utterly deserted.

"The games had hardly begun when—when the racket broke out, sir, and the boys secured everything when the lights went out."

"How did they go out? Who was nearest to the key?"

"I can't tell that. First I knew everything was black."

"We'll get at the whole truth some time, no doubt. Until then—you're not afraid to hold the fort alone for a bit, Johnny?"

"Not if you say so, sir."

"I do say so. The door is locked. Keep it locked. Let no one in without my pass. If any fool tries to bluff you, call him with a forty-five, and charge it to me. You understand?"

The bar-keeper bowed assent, his eyes moving uneasily toward that grim object on the floor.

"Never fear for that, my man. Dale never harmed you living; be sure he'll do you no hurt now he's dead!"

"But if I might run for a doctor, Mr. Savage?"

Ambrose laughed harshly, the sound chilling the blood of those who listened, his voice was so fiercely bitter and full of grief.

"Doctor! What avails drugs or human skill when that devil's invention sinks its claws to the seat of life? Four times now I've lived to see it take—"

Catching a warning look from his first-born, the giant cut his words short, tossing back his long hair, brushing a hand over his eyes.

Motioning his living sons toward the stairs, Ambrose Savage stooped and lifted the limp figure in his muscular arms, carrying it as easily and steadily as though it weighed but a trifle. And with that silver image almost touching his own cheek, he bore the dead upstairs, and into the chamber where he had been seated with his youngest born when the lights went out.

Still in that grim silence, he placed the body on the bed, pressing the hidden spring by which those venomous claws were worked, turning and dropping the Death Spider on the cracked table.

"Get a bottle, Boyd!" he heavily said, sinking into a chair, leaning both elbows on the table, and supporting his head, as he stared with dimmed eyes at that terrible bit of metal. "Every word takes the bark off; and I've got to talk!"

In silence Boyd obeyed, producing bottles and glasses from the closet beyond the bed. He filled a glass and handed it to his father, taking a long draught himself from the bottle.

Eno was standing near the bed, gazing with bloodshot eyes down upon that ghastly face, noting the tiny specks of blood that alone marked the fatal wound. Strange! Such a trifling scratch; hardly as much as the mark of a pin. Yet it meant death, sure and horribly sudden.

That was the worst of it all. Not even a second granted in which to repent, to breathe a prayer, or to bid adieu to friends, hope, light and life.

"I can't! I can't swallow it, brother!" he huskily muttered, refusing the glass of liquor which Boyd poured out and offered him.

"Can you—Come here, Kid!" sternly cried Ambrose, catching a chair with a toe, and dragging it nearer to his side. "Come here, where I can look into your two eyes. 'So!' with a grim nod as his son complied with his

command. "You can't bear it? Can you bear to repeat the vow you took in company with me, just a minute before Dale—before the Silver Slayer dealt his fourth blow?"

"I can—I do!" firmly said the young man, meeting that fiery gaze without flinching. "And if you hadn't choked me off, I'd have brought that devil back to meet his reward by the side of his last victim!"

"Where would you have gone to look for him, Kid? In the house of Enos Dunbar?"

"What? You don't, you can't still cling to that horrible delusion, father!" stammered the young man, shrinking back.

"I can and do stick to what I said, but I deny that it is a delusion, save on your part. I deny that Saul Sunday had part or lot in this devilish assassination, though!"

"When he was fighting with Dale? Who else could have done it?"

"Enos Dunbar, curse him—from crown to sole, curse him!" flashed the giant, his clenched hands rising above his head, quivering with an awful hatred and lust for revenge. "Curse him and his—"

Eno cried out sharply, his face flushing redly, then fading to a pallor matched only by that of his half-brother lying on the bed.

"Not that—not her—"

"Ay, curse father and child, root and branch! And curse you, boy, if you dare to stand up for the foul assassin who has ended the lives of four gallant lads, any one of whom was worth ten thousand such whining curs as you! You—with the marks of his lash on face and back! You to dare face me and utter a word in his defense?"

"I do dare so much, father," steadily spoke Eno, his shrinking gone and his eyes glowing with stern resolve. "I dare defend Enos Dunbar, because I know he could not possibly have done this deed. He was not in the Wigwam to-night!"

"How do you know so much, boy?"

"Was his name mentioned when you asked who had left the room? Did you see him, brother?" turning to Boyd, who silently shook his head.

"Did you see any one of half a dozen others? Enos Dunbar was one of those present, and his hand alone fastened the Death Spider on Dale. Could that gangling rascal have done it—with Dale's grip on his throat?"

"If he could have done that, he could not have killed Clay, last night," slowly uttered Boyd. "He was in my hands when Clay died. And—Enos Dunbar was out in the hills when the spider did its work!"

Still Eno Savage would not yield. To do so meant the loss forever of his love—the one bright oasis in his sad, gloomy life.

"I hate to stand out against both father and brother—all that are left, now!" with a husky tremor in his voice.

"You'd rather break your oath of vengeance—you'd rather dishonor the grave that holds the bones of your mother?"

"Prove to me beyond all doubt that Enos Dunbar is the criminal, and then ask me if I would spare him!" flashed Eno, his face briefly aglow, his voice ringing out clear and distinct.

"I will prove it—prove it by his own lips before another day and night rolls by! Prove it!" with a hard, pitiless laugh that sounded more vicious than an oath. "Ay! I'll prove it, if I have to torture his painted wench to death before his very eyes!"

Eno started to his feet with a choking cry of indignation at that coarse epithet, but a strong hand pushed him back and Savage growled:

"Where are you going? What do you mean to do?"

"To give Enos Dunbar a chance to defend him and his! While I draw the breath of life, father, you shall never commit so vile an outrage!"

With a snarling curse, Ambrose Savage caught Eno by the throat, crushing him to the floor with resistless might.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A GRIM OLD SAVAGE.

* BOYD SAVAGE stepped swiftly to one side, to avoid the twain, father and son, as they went down together with a shock that caused the Wigwam to shake throughout its timbers. But he made no attempt to aid the one or check the other, standing cold and impassive as he watched the vain struggles of the younger man.

Brief enough those words. In such hands Eno was little more than a babe. And as though fully realizing this, he ceased his struggles, only a hot defiance flashing from his blood-shot eyes.

"Face me, you whelp! Turn against your own father, for the sake of one whose whip has scarred your baby face and puny carcass? If you didn't look at me with her eyes—"

Ambrose Savage left the sentence incomplete, rising to his feet with Eno firmly pinioned by his muscular fingers. Turning so that the light fell fairly upon that scarred face, he gazed keenly into the eyes of his son—eyes which, despite the sullen defiance which blazed in their

depths, reminded him so strangely of those of his girl-wife.

"Boy, I hardly know why I have held my hand—I hardly know why I have spared your life after finding you a cowardly traitor, condemned by your own lips! Unless—Have you thought better of it, Kid?"

"I'll keep my oath, but first I must know that I'm striking at the real assassin."

"That assassin is Enos Dunbar. The same whose name is printed across your face in purple letters. The same who played his wench as a dainty lure, all the more easily to steal from your love-crazed brain the secrets of your family—the family he had sworn to wipe from the face of the earth—and already he has more than one-half obliterated it!"

The last words came from his lips almost a groan. But the weakness was only momentary.

"Swear that you will aid us in our vengeance, Eno Savage. Swear that, if necessary, you will even strike Weltha Dunbar for—"

"Not even for you, father!" flashed the young man.

Swift as thought those giant arms twisted him to the floor. A heavy knee was planted upon his back. A sinewy set of fingers tightly compressed his throat, effectually shutting off all outcry.

"Fetch me some rope, Boyd," coldly said the giant, glancing toward his first-born. "You'll find plenty bits in the closet yonder."

In silence Boyd obeyed. And still in silence he helped to bind his brother hand and foot, to securely gag him, then stood by and watched the giant lift the helpless youth in his arms, bearing him to the closet and roughly pitching him inside, closing and locking the door.

The grim old savage returned to his former seat, pouring out and drinking off a glass of whisky.

"What do you intend to do with him, father?"

"Keep him there until he comes to his senses, or until we've settled with Enos Dunbar, once for all. Curse the young rascal!" lowering his voice a little as he cast a shivering glance toward his murdered son, lying so still and ghastly white on the bed. "Only for—that, I believe I'd have wrung his neck like a chicken!"

"He's dead gone on the girl. Only for that, you'd find him true blue, for all his finical ways," moodily muttered the other.

"If he's not with us, heart, mind and body, he's against us. That leaves only two—and yesterday we were five!"

Grim old Savage though he was, his voice grew husky and his eyes dimmed at that. It was his one good trait, the one redeeming virtue; he loved his offspring, and to save any one of them, he would have died with a laugh on his lips and a smile in his eye.

"Only two, since the Kid don't count. All right, father," with a backward toss of his proud head as he added: "So much the more reason why we should banish all vain regrets and think only of vengeance. If we only knew for dead certain!"

"Don't you begin to harp on that string, Boyd, or—as there's a murdered boy! I'll serve you even worse than I did the Kid!"

"You'd make a try at it, I'm not doubting," with a cold smile fitting across his haggard features. "All right. You lay out the line, and I'll hew close along it, let the chips fall where they will!"

Ambrose Savage held out a hand, and their fingers closed tightly.

"It's my own son that's talking now," he nodded, grimly. "And now I'll take my turn for a little."

"You know what I told you up at the Den, about Wallace Yarrow? I said that he was a sort of universal genius, tinkering at almost everything. He dabbled in drugs and medicines. And he had a spell of play-acting. I never used with him or his, to any extent, but I remember people used to swear he could mimic anybody and anything; that he could make himself up so that his own dam wouldn't recognize him."

"Then you think—?"

"What was to hinder him from using that skill now? Couldn't he have worn a disguise of some sort and passed under our very noses without our suspecting him? And to-night—we weren't any of us in the saloon, save Dale. And he—well, after he sighted that gangling gawk, Saul Sunday, of course he had eyes only for him."

"It might have been done," thoughtfully muttered Boyd. "Dad owned up that some of the gang slipped out when I was knocked silly by the sight of that cursed spider."

"Dunbar was one of them, I'm laying my head!" flashed Ambrose. "Dad is true as steel, keen as a hawk, and too level headed to make a mistake even under such circumstances."

"He's all that. I wondered why you took such pains to shut him out with the rest."

"Not because I doubted him, be sure. But we can't afford to run any chances now, and he can serve us best by keeping up his role of bum-mer and free lunch fiend. Besides—I'd grudge even him a share in the work I have in view."

"That means against old Dunbar, of course."

"Against him and his! For if he's really what I feel sure, we'll need to pinch his dainty chick before we can make him squeal!"

"Lower!" warningly muttered Boyd, glancing toward the closet where his half-brother was held a prisoner. "No need to let him know what's in the wind until all's over."

"Do the whelp good to have something of the sort to think about, but have it that way if you like."

They drew their chairs closer together, talking in guarded whispers. And wicked though he undoubtedly was, Boyd Savage grew a shade paler as he listened to his father's words.

Though the Wigwam was watched closely by many interested parties from early sunrise to noon, they saw and heard very little to gratify their curiosity.

A coffin was taken in by way of the saloon, under charge of Dad Filkins, for once since his arrival at P. M. City wearing a decent suit from top to toe.

A brief notice was tacked to the shuttered door, stating that Dale Savage would be interred, in the little cemetery on the hill, at the hour of two P. M.

Promptly on time the door opened, and the waiting crowd caught sight of the Savage's father and son, bearing the coffin on a long, narrow handbarrow, Ambrose at the head, Boyd at the foot.

A score willing hands proffered assistance, but Ambrose Savage coldly declined all offers.

"It's the last service we can render him. He was a true son and brother to us. We will bury our own dead, and be beholden to none."

Following the coffin came Dad Filkins, Johnny DeWalt, the barkeeper, and behind them, in couples, the other men who served at the Wigwam.

In grim silence the procession left town and climbed to the little knoll on which showed a few rude stone memorials.

Without permitting even Dad to lend a hand, those two strong men, who showed their grief so strangely, lowered the coffin into the grave, and with uncovered heads stood with clasped hands across the pit.

Not a word was spoken aloud. If any were recorded mentally, only those twain knew or could guess what they meant.

Their eyes met above their clasped hands, gazing steadily into each other for a single breath, then that grip ended.

One on each side of the grave, Ambrose and Boyd filled in the damp earth, rounding the grave over and patting it down neatly.

This done, they cast their tools aside, returning to town, entering the Wigwam and locking the doors behind them.

"When they do come out—eyes open fer a holy circus!" grimly prophesied a veteran prospector.

"An' I want to be just nigh 'nough fer to see, ef they ever ketch up with that gamblin' thimble-rigger—I do!" quoth another.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A MODERN DOG TRAY.

"SHALL I, or sha'n't I? That is the question!"

A question put to himself by Saul Sunday, who never looked less like the original Saul Sunday than just at this moment of doubt.

It was the night following that marked by the tragic death at the bar of the Wigwam, and the detective was alone in the chamber assigned him by his present employer, Enos Dunbar.

A shaggy gray beard which would have defied any test short of actual violence masked his long face, rounded out by plumpers to fit in his cheeks. His naturally straight hair had been frizzed until it seemed to double the size of his head, giving him a "wild and woolly" look, as far as possible from the sad, subdued, broken-hearted showing made by the man of trials and tribulations.

These changes, together with a suit of rough garments, fitted out a veteran prospector to the life.

All was quiet under that friendly roof, and apparently Saul Sunday alone resisted the wooing of the drowsy god. Even his chamber showed no light by way of warning to curious eyes, should any be chanced to turn that way.

Late as he had retired to rest the night before, Saul Sunday had made his exit in his new character before the first rays of dawn, and through all that day he had been busy enough, though the results he attained were hardly as satisfactory as he could have wished.

In the first place, he learned that nothing had been seen or heard of the fugitive man with the shells, though a desultory search was still being kept up for him by a few of the more persistent citizens. This would have been far more earnest only for the strange apathy shown by those who should have been foremost in the hunt.

Saul Sunday lingered in town only long enough to hear this, to test his disguise, and to make sure that no one seemed to suspect the fact of Enos Dunbar's having been in the Wigwam at the time of the tragedy, in disguise. Then he left town and struck out for the hills in which he

had played so unexpected a part a couple of nights before.

Enos Dunbar had given him the results of his own search, thus narrowing down the limits, provided his surmises had been correctly founded on facts.

"But were they? I'm not nearly so sure as he seemed to be, and if I take another walk tomorrow, I'll scatter myself more according to my own bit o' guesswork. But—shall I risk it?"

This course of reasoning brought him back to the old sticking point; should he, dare he attempt to arrest what remained of the Savage family before knowing more about them?

"What do I know?" he mused, closing his eyes the better to concentrate his thoughts, lying on his bed with fingers lightly locked beneath his head. "Enough to justify the nippers, but would I get more than a measly couple or three road-agents? Would I get the rascals wanted so mighty bad at Secret Service headquarters? Would I get their outfit—that's the main question!"

Saul Sunday had learned enough since reaching P. M. City to feel positive that the Gamecocks on that night had been under command of Boyd Savage. And even before he discovered this much, he had hit on at least one prominent member of the gang, in the seeming bummer and free-lunch fiend, Dad Filkins, thanks to the unguarded cry which had burst from the cowed chief's lips as Yellow Pile announced the mysterious taking off of "Boss Clay."

"The main guys would make mighty tough nuts to crack, but I might pinch Daddy tight enough to make him sing a joyous tune. The only question is—shall I do it at once, or wait a little longer on the chance of striking it still richer?"

There were arguments to be made both in favor and against speedy action. Solemn Saul set himself the task of deliberately contrasting all these, one side against the other. And for a time he stuck faithfully to his self-appointed task. Then—

The chamber door which Saul Sunday had conscientiously locked before removing his outer garments, slowly, silently opened, giving admittance to a gigantic figure, faintly outlined by the dim light sifting through the muslin curtains at the single window beyond the bed.

Softly, peacefully as a child breathed the detective, still lying on his back with his fingers interlocked under the nape of his neck.

Without a sound, that dark, phantom-like shape moved aside, to give room for another, only a shade less massive in bulk. For a single breath both intruders seemed trying to recognize the sleeper, then their cowed heads moved close together, and one of them softly whispered:

"Not our game; what do with it?"

"Tie and gag—no chances!"

Silently, as though shod with velvet, the last speaker moved to the side of the bed, making a sign for his mate to guard against the man's using his lower extremities for the purpose of raising an alarm. Then one hand closed viciously over the exposed throat of the sleeping detective, his other arm curving to press across that face, an elbow pinning one arm, a set of fingers gripping the other, all combining to form an almost perfect safeguard against outcry or resistance.

"Snort a snicker an' I'll bloody murder ye all over!" coarsely growled the giant, glaring down into those startled eyes with orbs that literally seemed to burn. "Play lamb, an' ye shain't hev even a stray lock o' wool stole or clipped!"

The second shadow swiftly bound the ankles of the detective, sitting with his full weight upon them as he held other stout thongs in readiness for use when his mate should succeed in convincing the unfortunate it was worse than folly to kick against the pricks.

"Tain't you we're a'er, critter, but sence you was bloody fool 'nough fer to roust up an' try fer to take a onlawful peep—waal, take your choice; a spell o' waitin' with hobbles on, or—this!"

Still retaining that deadly grip on Sunday's throat, the giant shifted his other arm, to flash forth an ugly blade, holding it up before the protruding eyes of the half-suffocated detective.

"Look!" sharply breathed the other mask, pointing to the shaggy beard which had become displaced by that savage grip. "It's Saul Sunday! The critter they're offerin' big money fer down yan way!"

A short, harsh laugh bubbled from back of the second cowl.

"Sunday or Monday, big or little, that money ain't fer the likes o' us. Who'd go thar to c'lect the reward? Not fer Jo!"

"Sht his throat an' let 'em spend the dingbats fer plantin' him, then," growled the other, but his mate seemed in a less sanguinary humor, for he again addressed his helpless prisoner:

"So you're on the cross, too, he ye? Waal, I hate like blazes fer to give a feller-crook dirt, but when he comes atwixt me an' business, what else kin a critter do? Stick or tie? Wink ef you'd rather hev it the last way."

Although almost suffocated, Saul Sunday could hear and obey. He closed both eyes and held them tight, like one who wants no mistake made as to his meaning.

That deadly grip on his windpipe relaxed. The two masks fell to work swiftly, showing great natural skill or else native talent. For in less than a minute, the job was completed.

Saul Sunday was bound with hands behind his back, and a snug gag was fitted between his jaws.

"You want to lay right whar you be ontel the nigger comes fer to roust ye out to chuck, Friday," grimly nodded the giant as he and his comrade turned away from the bed to leave the room.

Weak, shivering, half unconscious from that terrible choking, the detective lay as he had been left, for many minutes. In fact he sunk into insensibility for a time.

His first waking sensation was that of hearing a faint, muffled shriek—or was it pure fancy, born of that dull ringing in his ears?

He listened, but no other sound came through his closed door.

That effort served to rally his scattered senses, and gradually Saul Sunday grew capable of reasoning out the case.

"What were they after? Who were they? Is it only fancy, or have I heard those voices—by the horn of Gabriel?"

He gave a start that half lifted himself from the bed, as the whole truth flashed upon his whirling brain.

He had heard those voices before—he had seen those figures, and at least one of them had worn much the same disguise as on this occasion.

"The Gamecocks—the Savages!"

His head dropped back to his pillow, and he closed his eyes the better to regain his lost self-control.

If he was right—and he could not doubt the perfect truth of the conviction which flashed across his brain—why had those two desperate rascals left him with life in his body? Why had they not slain him at once, since they had offered rewards for his capture, dead or alive as he had learned that day?

"Have they found out that I had no hand in that murder? Have they struck the right trail at last? Have they—Dunbar!"

The whole hideous truth flashed upon him, then, and now he believed he could rightly interpret that faint shriek which had roused him from his stupor.

"They've struck him—through his child!"

Without a thought for himself, Saul Sunday rolled over until he fell with a heavy shock to the floor. And with the desperate hope of alarming the house in time to save at least the innocent maiden, he repeatedly pounded his bound feet against the floor, striving with every nerve and muscle to burst his bonds asunder, to free his aching jaws from that gag, in order to bring help by shouting aloud.

For the moment he forgot that, unless he had mistaken the sound, Weltha Dunbar must already have fallen into the ruthless hands of the Savages. For the time being he was little better than a madman, very unlike his usual self: cool, keen, clear-witted.

Almost suffocating, he ceased his mad efforts for a brief space, lying still and straining his ears in listening. Not a sound came to tell him that his alarm had roused the house. Not a sound—save the buzzing in his ears, caused by his swiftly leaping blood.

"Too late! They've done their bloody work! They had time—how long must I have lain there, helpless?"

The truth was forcing itself upon him, now, for he knew that he had made noise enough to waken the heaviest sleeper, even in the most remote chamber. Yet not an answering sound—not a cry, not a hurrying footstep could he catch.

Once again he assailed the sounding floor with his pinioned feet. Again and again he fought with his bonds, tugging, twisting, straining, until he felt his skin part and the warm blood begin to flow.

He rolled over on his face and fiercely rubbed it against the floor, hoping to at least free his jaws, for—was that smoke he detected?

He fought against that hideous fear, but it grew stronger and more sure with the passage of each minute. It was not fancy. His eyes were beginning to smart. His nostrils were stinging. He could see a bluish mist hovering between himself and the curtained window, through which the moon cast a dim light.

The merciless fiends! They had bound and gagged him, leaving him to roast to death! This was their revenge for the part he had so unwillingly played that night at the Wigwam—and he had credited them with at least an atom of mercy, of justice!

He rolled over and over until close beneath the window. He tried to gain his feet, but in vain; all he could do was to reach a sitting posture, then topple over as he fought for more.

The room was filling with bitter, acrid smoke. His lungs were filling, laboring heavily, even so soon. What would it be when—

With a hoarse growl deep down in his throat, Saul Sunday made a desperate effort, dashing his bound feet against the lower sash.

The glass shattered, letting in a flood of fresh air.

CHAPTER XXX.

IN THE GRIP OF THE SAVAGE.

"I'd rather have slit his throat and ended it off-hand, father," said Boyd Savage, as the two men closed the door behind them, leaving the detective helplessly bound within.

"Let him suffer!" growled Ambrose. "Toasting is plenty good for him. If he didn't play the Death Spider, still it was through him that Dunbar got a chance to strike Dale. Let him roast, curse him!"

There was no reply. Boyd was not soft-hearted enough to enter into a dispute over such a matter, and they had still more important business on hand.

They had entered that chamber, picking the lock, feeling confident that they would find Enos Dunbar sleeping there. They knew it had been his chamber, and being ignorant of the fact that another man had taken up his quarters in the house, they had naturally looked for their prey in that quarter first.

Stealthily, without awaking the faintest echoes, the two avengers crept to another chamber, Boyd, as having the finest sense of hearing, bending an ear at the keyhole, his eyes glowing as he caught the faint sound of breathing beyond that barrier.

With a warning gesture he tried the knob. The door was locked.

With a pair of nippers he quickly, silently turned the bolt, listening to see if the faint click had startled the sleeper. Not so: for that calm, peaceful breathing still came to his ear.

Slowly, cautiously he turned the knob, pushing the door swiftly open, knowing that thus he would be most sure of avoiding any creaking sound should the hinges prove to be rusty.

And as he felt the hand of the giant close convulsively upon his shoulder, Boyd knew that they had found their prey at last.

A dim night lamp was burning upon the stand, its rays just sufficient to reveal the face and figure of Enos Dunbar.

He was lying on the bed, his strong features calm, his face looking very unlike that which one naturally pictures in thinking of a crime-stained character. One hand was resting beneath his cheek, the other arm lying on the outside of the covers.

With a swift, pantherish stride, Ambrose Savage reached the bedside, his giant grip fastening upon his victim, effectually cutting off all chance of raising an alarm.

"Pin his legs, boys!" he grated, as he jerked the bewildered man out of bed, holding him at arm's length and entirely clear of the floor, by that awful grip about his throat. "Got ye, have I, Silver Spider?"

Boyd worked swiftly, and as Dunbar seemed literally paralyzed by that terrible clutch, it was an easy task to complete the job. And with a gag between his jaws, Enos Dunbar was firmly strapped to a heavy arm-chair, wholly at the mercy of his captors.

Ambrose Savage drew back and contemplated his prize for a few moments in silence, his eyes filled with an unholy light, his powerful fingers working as though they longed to finish the deadly work they had so gladly begun. And though he was hardly more than half conscious, Enos Dunbar shivered violently as his eyes closed in horror.

"Go, lad!" growled Ambrose, with a nod toward the door. "You know what comes next: do that yourself, and do it sure!"

Without a word in reply, Boyd Savage turned away, leaving that bitterly hated man alone with his enemy.

"Open your eyes, cur!" growled the giant, gripping Dunbar's chin between thumb and finger, rudely lifting his head. "Quit shivering and try to look me in the face. So!"

Mechanically Dunbar obeyed, staring blankly at that sable cowl, for the time being unable to fully appreciate his peril.

"Do you recognize me, Enos Dunbar?" bending over his victim with a low laugh that was even more terrible than his curses. "Do you recognize what lies hidden behind this mask? That, itself, I know you can have no difficulty in recognizing, for you have seen one like it before to-night. Shall I tell you when was the last time?"

Of course there could be no answer, in words, but Dunbar shrunk as far back as his bonds would permit, shivering anew, his eyes filled with mingled rage and horror.

"Night before last, Enos, out in the hills north of the Up-grade trail. You had business there, I believe. Business. Was it in the curio line, I wonder? And did you see fit to carry a specimen of your art with you, for a customer? Who, Enos Dunbar?"

His voice grew hoarser, his speech more labored, to stop short as he tried to pronounce the name of his best-beloved son. He could not utter that name just then. And turning away, the better to conceal his growing emotion from the eyes of his hated foe, Ambrose Savage fought the battle out in silence.

All was still throughout the house. Not a sound—Ah!

He crossed the space between himself and the door at a leap, his felt-shod feet giving back no

sound. He opened the door, and thrust his head outside, listening intently.

All was still. Surely he had been mistaken in fancying he caught the sound of a stifled scream?

"I was a fool!" he inwardly said, frowning darkly. "Boyd knows his duty too well for that. A wench. He'd break her in two rather than let her give a chirp above her breath!"

Stifling his short-lived uneasiness thus, Ambrose Savage drew back his head and closed the door once more. Turning to his chief prize, he laughed low and gratingly, as he saw how ghastly pale that face had grown.

"You begin to think this is a little more than a nightmare, do you, dear fellow?" he mockingly asked, drawing a chair forward, and sitting down close in front of the bound man. "Your thick brain is beginning to clear, and the cobwebs are dropping away from your eyes! Good! I'd hate to have to wreak vengeance on a lump, a block, a mass of clay!"

"No, no, Enos Dunbar! I've waited and prayed too long for that. I have suffered all the torments of the eternally damned for many long years, through your devilish cunning. I have grown old long before my time through the deadly blows your hand has dealt me from under cover—cover so sure, so cunning that even my eyes, sharpened by the agony such as only a father can feel, were powerless to penetrate it.

"I might never have known whose hand struck me so surely to the heart—I might even have gone to my grave in hideous ignorance, had you been content to continue as you began. But when you invited attention to your own life, by trying to openly tear the mask from my way of living and getting a living, then you made your first rash step.

"That course of action led me to wonder who and what you are, who wanted the whole earth for your own convenience, and so wondering, I fell to investigating. And that—shall I tell you what it all led up to, Enos Dunbar?"

"It showed me, first, a dim, haunting likeness in your face to some one who had crossed my path in life, many long years ago. For days and weeks and months I tried in vain to fasten that likeness to some known name. And when I had succeeded, I could not believe. I told myself I was crazy. I knew the owner of that face was dead and in his grave, long ago; a grave for which I fitted him!"

"I was blind, you see," with a low, ugly laugh. "I refused to recognize the light, even when it flamed up before my eyes. Yet—I was not fully content. I must know more—and so I set one of my gallant lads to spying on your track.

"Do you know whom I mean? Was that what carried you to the Wigwam last night? Was that why you turned off the gas and under cover of the darkness, committed a crime ten thousand fold as dark and hideous? Was that why you clapped the Death Spider on the temple of my gallant son, Dale Savage?"

As he uttered that last fierce question, Ambrose Savage tore off the sable cowl, revealing his haggard face, no longer handsome, but resembling that of an avenging demon.

"You see I'm no longer afraid of your denouncing me as one of the Mountain Gamecocks, you cur! For when I leave you, this night, neither me nor mine will be in any danger of being denounced to the bloodhounds as breakers of the law.

"You have reached the length of your tether in P. M. City, as Enos Dunbar. That name has served your purpose fairly well, but now you will finish your career under the name with which you began it, back in old Kentucky—Wallace Yarrow!"

The prisoner gave a start, a hoarse, inarticulate sound rising in his throat, a wild, frightened light leaping into his eyes.

Ambrose Savage laughed again, this time with his head turned partly toward the door, for his keen ears caught the sound of approaching footsteps. And as the knob turned, he cried out viciously:

"Torments before death, Wallace Yarrow, even as you have tortured me! And my first blow—look, you poisoning hound!"

The door opened and Boyd Savage entered the room, bearing across one arm the half-dressed figure of Weltha Dunbar.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ITS FAIREST VICTIM.

THE old man raised a hand. Boyd shifted his burden until the feet of the maiden touched the floor, bringing her face toward that bound, gagged and helpless man.

Her own eyes were widely open as they met his, but the silken scarf which had been bound firmly over her lips and chin smothered back the cry of mingled terror and pity that welled up in her throat.

Ambrose laughed another brief, mirthless peal, seemingly without longer fear of attracting unwelcome attention. And with a grim hand pointing to the girl, he addressed the father:

"That is my answer, Wallace Yarrow. There shall my first blow fall. Even as your hand has

smitten me, so shall mine smite you, through your living heart!"

The father strove to burst his bonds, to utter an articulate cry, if only a single word; but those avengers had done their work far too thoroughly for success to attend his efforts.

The maiden strove to break away from the villain who held her in his vise-like grip, but it was like fighting fate. Cold, hard, pitiless, Boyd Savage stood there, silently enjoying this, the first fruits of their sternly-planned vengeance.

"I know what you would say, Wallace Yarrow, if you could recover the use of your tongue. You'd swear by heaven and earth that the girl was innocent; you'd take oath that she had neither part nor lot in the feud between us; you'd beg for her sake even as you'd lie for your own; but the time for that is long since past.

"I'd tell you that neither did my gallant boys share the crime—if crime you call it—of the days so long gone by. Yet—where are they now?"

Again something seemed to rise in his throat, smothering his voice until he turned purple in the face, laboring for breath so violently that a look of anxiety came into the eyes of his son.

With a passionate gesture Ambrose Savage motioned his son away, rising from his seat and catching Enos Dunbar up in his mighty arms, chair and all, a single heave throwing the clumsy burden upon his broad shoulders as he turned toward the door.

Boyd picked the shivering form of the daughter up in his arms, and led the way from the chamber to the stairs. Down these he passed, followed by the giant with his captive. Into the library where Enos Dunbar had partly taken the detective into his confidence, to pause at the door and close it again after Ambrose Savage had passed through with his helpless enemy.

The giant planted the arm-chair with its contents near the center of the room, turning the dimly-lighted lamp higher, until a mellow-glow made all things distinct about the room.

"Sit down, Boyd, and take off that hood of yours. We're Gamecocks no longer, and have no need of hiding our faces. Sit down, and hold the wench where their eyes can meet. 'Twill not be the first time she has rested on Savage knees or in Savage arms, I'll warrant!"

Without a word his first-born obeyed. His face showed haggard, his great eyes seeming to have sunken far back in his head. For lack of color, that face might have belonged to a corpse, or it might have been a marble mask, for all the emotion its hard lines betrayed.

So far it was the face of a better man than his father: while he would show no pity, no mercy, no hesitation in striking a terrible blow for vengeance, he would never stoop to mock and berate his victims as Ambrose Savage found a vicious pleasure in doing.

"It's been long, long years since we stood face to face with no disguise between us, Wallace Yarrow," said the old man, standing with one hand resting on the center-table, the other hidden in his bosom. "Almost a lifetime—ay! longer than the span of many and many a better, truer, nobler life than either yours or mine!"

"You were a whining, hypocritical whelp at the best, Wallace Yarrow, in those early days, and richly deserved the lot that was measured out unto you. Yet—if ever mortal sinner bitterly and sincerely repented the harm wrought another, then I repented my sins toward you.

"I went back to learn if there was any possible chance of making reparation, as far as that lay in my power, but they told me you were dead. They showed me your grave. They could not tell me where to seek for such of your kindred, or the relatives of the woman through whom all had happened. And so—I buried the past, resolved to live a better and purer life.

"For years I did so. For years I tried to live down the memory of those mad days of my youth. And then—

"You best know how that peaceful spell was broken. It can be no new story to you. And yet—it does me good to recall it all! If more bitter than death, in itself, it will make what is yet to come all the sweeter—by sharpening my hatred toward you and yours, 'twill lend a delicious spice to my long-deferred feast of vengeance!"

"You know how the first blow fell. You know how we came upon the lifeless body of his mother's pet—Archie!"

"And less than one hour before, my hot lips had almost cursed him for bringing a shade over the name and honor of his family! Only an hour before I would have cursed him, had not my good wife, his tear-blinded mother, checked my impious words.

"You know why: you know that many others besides his father felt that Archer had deserted his bride, even before the sacred words that were to have united them for life, had been spoken. And you know how we found him—how we bore him back to the wedding feast—cold in death, with the Silver Spider fastened to his throat!"

"And you doubtless laughed aloud to yourself as you heard how his widowed bride was carried to her room, a raging maniac!"

His voice had grown unsteady as he drew this awful picture, and Ambrose Savage paused, though he retained his position, never once removing his glowing eyes from that ghastly pale face.

Once more the accused tried to break his bonds, to eject that suffocating gag from between his lips. But all was in vain. He could not utter more than a choking groan by way of self-defense or denial.

"That was the first, but not the last, Wallace Yarrow," coldly, grimly resumed the giant avenger. "Though we strained every nerve and tried every means of solving the awful mystery, it remained an enigma. And then—less than a year after we found Archer—the Silver Slayer again paid us a visit, this time to send Marsh to his grave."

"It was the same story: a hideous mystery that nothing could solve. And with a half-crazed wife, I pulled up stakes and left that doubly accursed spot."

"That was easy. Forgetting came harder. I was haunted, night and day. I could think of nothing but that accursed Death Spider and the marks each one bore carved upon its back. And day by day the mother faded away, pining to death for her murdered boy!"

"Must you go through the whole story, father?" coldly interposed his first-born. "He must know the details, even better than you can tell him. And—I'm growing thirsty for the first taste, father!"

The giant broke into a low, ugly laugh, wetting his parched lips with the tip of his tongue, like one preparing for a rich feast.

"Not hungrier than I am, boy! So—to boil it down, you poisoning bound!—we all went to the bad, lacking her restraining influence."

"In the end we brought up here, little thinking that by so doing we were coming right into your fresh stamping-grounds. We had almost forgotten that such a vampire had ever existed; much less did we recognize it in the rich, popular Enos Dunbar!"

"Why you held back your devilish hand so long, I can't even guess, unless it was to make your blows fall harder in the end, stunning and blinding by their very swiftness."

"Night before last you were out in the hills, north of the Up-grade trail. So was my gallant lad Clay. And there you left the Death Spider, marked with the figure three!"

"Last night you came to the Wigwam in cunning disguise. When you stole away from it, another brave lad lay dead, with that fatal bug fastened to his face!"

"Four times you have struck my children to wound me where alone I could feel a hurt. Four times you chose food for your devilish spiders. Now—it is my turn!"

That hand came forth from his bosom as the words passed his lips, gripping between thumb and finger the fatal spider bearing a figure four cut in its dull back—the same which had been so strangely applied to the face of Dale Savage that night in the Wigwam.

"Look at it, Wallace Yarrow," his harsh voice added, almost monotonous in its measured evenness, despite the awful hatred which filled his fiery eyes. "Admire your cunning handicraft, as no doubt you have so often done while studying your part, while waiting for the right moment to come in which you could strike still another blow against the heart of the man whose strong arm pounded your face to a pulp, even while your lead was biting away at his vitals."

"Look once more, poisoner! Take note of the number graven upon its back: the figure 4. You were too generous to even think of using the same spider twice; but I'm made of less fine clay! I am not too proud to handle your leavings, nor above making use of second-hand articles."

"Time is passing, father," impatiently growled his first-born.

"Time has come, rather!" flashed the giant, as he partly turned toward the almost senseless maiden whom Boyd was supporting on his lap. "Time for work—time for my hand to strike a blow at your black heart, Wallace Yarrow, even as you have struck so heavily at mine."

"Yet—if you had only raised a larger crop of children, you cur! If you only had a thousand to pit against each one of mine! Then I might hope to even up things—but now—bring the wench a little closer, Boyd; perhaps her noble father would like to take a parting glance from her brown eyes, since he is denied a word or kiss from her sweet lips."

In frowning silence Boyd Savage obeyed, holding the poor girl in front of her no less helpless parent, feebly striving to call out his name, to fling herself into his arms.

"A fair morsel for the Death Spider, don't you think, Wallace Yarrow?" pitilessly asked the giant, holding that frightful emblem of vengeance close to the poor child's throat. "Yet you first brought her into this game of death and bitter black revenge. You trained her to act as your decoy. You taught her to smirk and smile and bestow her false kisses upon my youngest-born, the more surely to win your ends. And when you thought those ends were

fairly won, you turned upon the love-mad boy and scarred him, face and body, with your lash."

"Now—can you guess what is to be my vengeance? Simple, poor enough no doubt you'll think, remembering how artistic your own work has been, but I'm not a student: I'm not wise enough to invent. I can only imitate, in my own poor way, the example set before me."

"You see? Her fair throat lies bare. In her haste to pay you a final visit, the dear creature could stop to only slip on a gown over her night-dress."

"It is a pretty throat. A fair, rounded, delicious throat. If I were not so old and broken down—mainly through the heavy blows your cunning hand has dealt me, remember! Only for that, I could fasten my lips there far more greedily than even this death-bug will cling with its poisoned fangs!"

"Then we will leave you, Wallace Yarrow, to repent of your sins as well as time will permit. We'll see that you lack not for light, for warmth—to prepare you for the bath which Satan is even now preparing for your soul!"

With a blood-curdling laugh, Ambrose Savage moved his hand still closer to that fair throat. Then—the Death Spider threw out its venomous fangs and clung to the white flesh.

A single convulsive tremor agitated that graceful figure. Then—with a stifled cry of horror, Boyd Savage dropped her body to the floor, while Wallace Yarrow—or Enos Dunbar—lost his senses.

CHAPTER XXXII.

PLUCKED FROM THE BURNING.

WHAT tortures of mind Enos Savage endured while helplessly imprisoned in that narrow closet where he had been cast by the arms of his own father, can never be adequately described in cold type.

For himself he would have cared comparatively little, but his fear for his beloved Weltha almost drove him mad. And mad he might have become in bitter earnest, only for his fierce resolve to effect his escape in time to save at least the daughter from the horrible vengeance which he knew his kindred were planning to administer.

For hours at a time he fought against his bonds, pausing only when his bodily powers were exhausted, or when the echo of an approaching footstep warned him that he was about to be visited.

Those visits were few and far between. Only to bring him food and drink. Now it was his father, then Boyd who did this, stern and silent, refusing to answer his questions or to question him in turn.

They never released his hands, preferring to feed him. And each time Enos ate and drank heartily, the better to enable him to maintain that desperate fight against his cruel bonds.

At last he succeeded in freeing his hands, though in doing so he stripped them both of skin and even flesh, benumbing them so terribly that he lost many precious minutes in trying to restore their usefulness so that he might pick the knots of the bonds that still rendered him helpless to act as he wished.

In the end he succeeded, and managed to burst the lock of his prison door, though the sounds thus made caused him to fear that his ruthless captors would hasten to return him to his prison again.

"Never alive!" he muttered, staggering dizzily as he clinched the knife which he drew from the sheath at the back of his neck. "I've no father—no brother, now! I've only my love—my God!" with a choking groan of intensest fear as he reflected on the many hours which must have crept by while he was lying in that hole, so utterly helpless. "Have I even her left?"

That awful fear lent his weakened limbs steadiness if it drove all thought of prudence from his mind, and clinching that trusty weapon in his bleeding hand, its shining blade lying inside his sleeve, Enos Savage made his way down-stairs and into the bar.

Neither his father nor his brother were present, and without giving word or look to the others, he caught up a decanter of whisky which was resting on the bar, drinking a few swallows, then dropping it and staggering out into the night.

Almost mechanically his steps led him in the direction of the Dunbar residence, and it was only when his dazed eyes caught a reddish reflection through the lower windows that something like full consciousness returned to him.

For a single breath he gazed bewilderedly at that ominous light, growing brighter and stronger with the passage of each moment. Then, as he realized the awful truth, his voice rung out in a wild alarm as he leaped the fence and hurled his shoulders against the closed and locked front door.

That single thrust burst the frail barrier down, and he staggered, to trip at the foot of the stairs, choking with the acrid smoke as he again shouted forth the alarm at the top of his voice.

"Was it—surely that was an answering cry, coming from the upper floor?"

"Weltha—my love!" he cried, catching hold of the balustrade as a guide and leaping swiftly

up the stairs. "Bear up—I'm coming! My love—I'm here!"

Again that answering cry came to his ears, just in time to guide him to the closed door, for already the building was filled with smoke so densely that eyesight was of little avail, even had the darkness been less great.

Only one who was almost crazed could for a moment have mistaken that choked voice for the sweet notes of a maiden, but Enos Savage was so nearly beside himself that the difference did not occur to him, even when he shivered the door with a mighty thrust, staggering blindly to the bedside.

"Weltha—darling—"

"Here, cut me loose!" hoarsely cried Saul Sunday, rolling away from the window and pounding his feet heavily on the floor. "Quick! we'll save the girl and her father if you—God of mercy! don't leave me to roast like a dog!"

Enos was turning away with a groan of horrified despair as he saw in that dim outline a man, not his loved one; but crazed though he was, he could not resist that last appeal.

With a few swift slashes that cut more than senseless cord, he set the detective at liberty, then staggered back to the door, almost suffocating with the bitter smoke.

"Take that room, I'll look here!" cried Sunday, once more the cool and clear-witted man, now that he had liberty to move and act for himself. "Haste—it's growing hot as Tophet up here!"

He searched two chambers without avail, though he found the night lamp by the rays of which Enos Dunbar had been taken prisoner, still burning in one of the rooms.

He saw that the bed had been slept in, and had no time to waste in looking further. And with the lamp in one hand, he hastened to where Enos Savage was standing by another bed, dazed and stupefied, almost overcome by those deadly fumes.

"Come, man!" hoarsely cried Sunday, gripping an arm and dragging the lover toward the door. "She's gone—safe from burning! Don't you see? She was sleeping there—she roused up and—Hark!"

From outside came the faint shouts of citizens hastening toward the spot, roused by the wild cries of the young man, or else having caught sight of that growing light through some other means.

"Let go—she's burning—I must save her or share—"

"She's down there, I tell you, man!" sternly cried Sunday, tightening the grip Enos strove in vain to break. "Don't you hear her call? Can't you hear her begging you to come to her?"

Still the crazed lover fought against him, and blowing out the light, Sunday hurled the lamp through the window, catching Enos in his arms and bodily bearing him down-stairs.

The heat was greater here than it had been above, though the smoke proved less dense. Already the red glow of the fire afforded some guidance, as the forked tongues of flame flickered snake-like as they shot across the hall.

Enos still fought against that strong grip, and just before the foot of the stairs was reached, his legs tangled with those of his companion, casting them headlong to the hall floor.

The shock broke Sunday's grip, and with a choking cry, Enos staggered to his feet, blindly rushing away from the open front door.

Tripping on the carpet, he plunged head-first against the library door, bursting it open with the shock of his fall. And then a choking cry came to his ears.

"Weltha—darling—"

Blinded by the smoke, scorched by the flames, which were rapidly being fanned to fury by the in-rushing air, Enos regained his feet and staggered forward, his hands outstretched, his one thought being to rescue his loved one from that frightful doom.

He struck against the heavy chair in which Enos Dunbar was sitting, helpless to save himself, his garments already beginning to catch fire, his gagged jaws unable to emit more than an inarticulate groan.

"My love—together—" gasped Enos, too far gone to recognize that human figure, but tightening his clasp about it as Saul Sunday cried through the doorway:

"Quick! for your life, man!"

It was the one spur needed by that poor fellow. And with a power lent him by the emergency, he lifted chair and all, turning and rushing from the hungry flames which had already ignited his light garments.

Sunday backed away toward the door, ready to lend a hand in case the young man should trip or fall, guiding him by his cries, which were echoed back by the rapidly gathering crowd on the outside.

And thus Enos Dunbar was saved by the man whom he had so mercilessly flogged.

Over the threshold staggered Enos Savage, to fall senseless as he was relieved of that burden by a score of eager hands, the owners of which quickly tore the blazing clothes from his limbs, while others did the same service for Enos Dunbar before they fairly recognized his bonds and the gag between his jaws.

Enos Savage quickly recovered, staring around him in search of his loved one. To leap up with

a choking cry as he recognized the one he had rescued from what was now a glowing furnace.

"Weltha—I'll save you or die with you!" he screamed, darting toward the doorway, now filled with angry flames.

And when Saul Sunday caught him in his arms, he shrieked aloud in terrible despair, falling back as though stricken dead.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

WHAT SAUL SUNDAY FOUND.

"SOMEBODY—but who?"

Saul Sunday asked himself that question, clinging to a limb with one hand, shading his eager eyes with the other, as he craned his long neck to prolong his view of that rapidly skulking figure, as it dodged and twisted through the tangle of rocks and bushes beyond.

"If I didn't know for almost certain that he was fit subject for the hospital, I'd take oath it was old Dunbar himself!"

The skulking figure had disappeared, but the detective marked its probable course as well as he could under the circumstances, muttering those words to himself in a puzzled tone. Although he had gained but a brief and imperfect view of the fellow making his way through that wild tangle, his size, shape, everything strongly recalled the old man who had, almost by a miracle, escaped the bitter vengeance of the Savages, father and son, only the night last past.

"It's Dunbar, or Dunbar's double. Just which, may I be able to say with certainty before the sun winks out."

Saul Sunday scrambled down from the point of rocks to which he had climbed with no little difficulty a short time before, hoping from thence to sight something by which he might fairly locate himself. For in trying to find the spot at or near which the Gamecocks had wrought their evil work, on the night they blockaded the Up-grade trail, the detective had only succeeded in pretty well befogging himself.

"My cabeza's crammed with that infernal smoke, reckon!" he frowned, as he looked to his weapons before gliding forward to pick up that trail. "I've been staggering around like a blind gander all day. Wonder will I pull that fellow, or will he pluck me?"

Those doubts did not prevent the detective from quickly striking the trail, thanks to the precautions he had taken before leaving the point of rocks. Just there a bit of favorable ground received and retained footprints, but Saul Sunday was too eager to catch sight of the fellow himself, to do more than give those tracks a passing glance.

"Mighty nigh pay-dirt!" he muttered grimly, back of his false beard. "Toes pointing both ways, and unless the fellow is a double-ender, that ought to mean a station of some sort in the wilderness."

Just one more glimpse did Saul Sunday catch of that mysterious figure, then he lost all clew as to its further progress. The soil was of such a nature that the human foot left no impression to tell which one of the different ways its owner had chosen.

Taking everything into consideration, Saul Sunday was inclined to think the whole world was turning the wrong way that day. As he grimly put it: he must have got out of the wrong side of his bed that morning!

Any ordinary man would have sought another bed, and kept to it for at least an hour or two, after the terrible experience of that night; but the detective hardly waited to have his burns dressed before he was out of P. M. City, hunting for those who had at last struck a vicious blow to partly square the Silver Spider account.

Outside, because even before he counted up his injuries, Sunday found the Wigwam deserted by its proprietors. Found that neither Ambrose Savage nor his son, Boyd, nor Dad Filkins, the pretended bumner, were to be discovered inside the town limits.

Almost feeling like cursing his greediness in not being content with arresting them as Gamecocks, trusting to luck to enable him to connect them with the counterfeiting case, Sunday promptly made his business known to the gentleman who acted as town marshal, and placed him on guard over the Wigwam, with instructions to promptly arrest and hold either of those three men.

He took time to pay a visit to the house where Enos Dunbar had been taken to have his burns dressed, but left without gaining any of the information he sought.

Though not dangerously burned, Dunbar seemed in a very bad way. If he ever recovered from the terrible shock which he had that night received, he could hardly be expected to be the same man again.

Saul Sunday stopped to ask a word about Eno Savage, whose bodily injuries were far more serious than those of the man whom he had carried out of that blazing furnace, and whose mind seemed even more completely wrecked.

Strong men watched beside him, ready to lend their power to the broad bandages with which

the unfortunate young man was tied to the bed. For at intervals his restless moaning, his feeble calling to his loved one, would change to wild screams and crazy struggling to free himself and rush into that sea of fire out of which his darling was calling to him for help.

The detective made one more pause in hopes of gleaning information which might possibly be of value, but Patsy, the fat housekeeper, could give him no information of interest to himself, however glibly her tongue ran on.

She had been surprised in her bed, blinded, bound, dragged out into the night and rolled into the little ditch near the rear end of the yard, where she had only been discovered by one of the excited citizens tripping on the brink and pitching headlong into her stomach.

No, she had not recognized any of "dose debbles." She had seen nothing of her young mistress. She had no doubt the poor child was lying in ashes, under those cruel coals.

Saul Sunday refused to believe the case was quite so bad as that, but it was in an almost discouraged mood that he finally left town and took the Up-grade trail, wearing a fresh disguise in place of that which the flames had ruined.

He believed that the Savages had carried Weltha away, alive, meaning to subject her to still more bitter torments in revenge for the blows her father had, as they supposed, dealt their tribe.

If this supposition was true, they would almost certainly hasten with her to their counterfeiting den, as being the most secure prison, and where they could pursue their revenge without fear of being interrupted by an outsider.

Doubtless they had fled from town with their captive immediately after applying the torch, believing the doom of those two bound wretches surely sealed. And equally without doubt, some of their outlaw allies in town would hasten to carry the alarm to their chieftains.

It was on the double chance of stumbling onto the Den, or else intercepting one of the road-agents while seeking to warn the Savages, that Saul Sunday hastened to the hills in which he had so narrowly escaped sharing the awful fate which had overtaken his traveling companion, Carl Rank.

Worn and weary, his head almost splitting as an after-effect of that fiery, smoky ordeal, Saul Sunday doggedly pushed on through the wilderness, long after he had lost all trace of that skulking figure which so strongly reminded him of Enos Dunbar.

"Serves me right for being such an ass!" he grimly declared. "Why couldn't I have kept one eye on the town, to pick up and pinch the first rascal who couldn't read his title clear to a trip in the hills? Go on, and keep a-going, you bleary-eyed idiot!"

Those self-deprecating words had hardly sulkily crossed his lips when Saul Sunday stopped short, rubbing his eyes with one hand while the other gripped a revolver at his waist.

For right before him, until now hidden by the rocks and bushes through which he had desperately forced a way, stood a small, rude, dilapidated cabin of sticks and crooked logs, roughly chinked with clay and chips!

One fair look, then Saul Sunday was himself again.

He sunk silently to the ground, worming back under cover, weapons ready for use at an instant's warning. For a tiny thread of blue smoke was curling above the chimney, telling plain as words that the cabin was inhabited.

"Who by?" he asked himself, scanning each crack and chink on the side nearest him, half expecting to see a spout of smoke leap forth to the echo of exploding powder. "Surely that can't be the place where the coney men do their work?"

As no alarming sound came to his ear, Saul Sunday shifted his position, stealing noiselessly up to the end of the cabin where stood the stick-and-daub chimney, rightly thinking that he would run less risk of being seen by the occupant from that quarter. For occupant there was, as he had already discovered, thanks to his unusually keen sense of hearing.

A weak, fretful cry or groan came to his ears, and dropping to his knees, the detective cautiously enlarged a tiny chink between two logs, applying an eye to the aperture—then starting back with an involuntary exclamation that alarmed the person inside the cabin.

"Dunbar—is that you?" came a strange, quavering voice. "Don't play me tricks, man! I'm so—I can't stand it!"

With face blanched white as death itself could have made it, Saul Sunday caught his breath with labored gasps, for of all discoveries mortal man ever made, this was one of the most incredible.

The grave had given up its dead! The man in yonder bore the face of Carl Rank, the man whom he had resurrected, only to rebury as dead beyond all doubt!

"Who is it—Dunbar?" repeated that strangely broken voice. "God of mercy! am I to suffer still more?"

With a desperate effort Saul Sunday rallied his shaken nerves and passed around to the

front of the cabin, opening the door by means of the leather latch-string.

"I'm a friend to all honest men," he said, pausing on the threshold with a strange sensation of awe as he caught sight of that ghastly pale face: the face of Carl Rank, but how sadly altered for the worse! "And you—you are Carl Rank?"

Gasping for breath, shivering like a leaf, the once strong and resolute detective cowered on his rude pallet, seeming an utter wreck!

"It is you!" with a long breath. "You are alive! And yet I could have sworn you were dead and in your grave!"

"Pity—spare me—don't send me back to—pity!"

As he saw that haggard face sink back, Sunday sprang forward and lifting the head, placed a liquor flask to those white lips. Mechanically Carl Rank took a swallow or two, but that pitiful look of terror never left his sunken eyes, and he shivered at that friendly touch.

"Tell me how you were saved, dear fellow," soothingly uttered Sunday, as he gently lowered that head upon its rude pillow. "Who took you from that grave, after—"

He stopped short, frightened by that weak, unnerved cry, and for a little space he felt that he could not press the point further, though so much might depend on his speedily getting at the full truth of this seeming miracle.

He could see that the horrors of that living burial had completely broken this once strong man down; could see that his nerves were wholly shattered, leaving but a miserable wreck behind.

"You must trust, not fear me, Carl Rank," he slowly, gently uttered, steeling himself against that sad shivering, closing his ears to that pitiful moaning sound. "I am an honest man, an officer of the law, and I swear to protect you against all enemies if you will trust me. But if I am to be of any service to you, you must try to brace up and tell me just who and what I have to work against."

"You—you left me—you buried me again, when I was trying to beg you to save me!" cried Rank, with a touch of angry reproach coming into his voice.

"God of love!" ejaculated Sunday, his own face blanching at that terrible thought. "You knew—you were conscious, all through that?"

"Do you wonder that I'm weak and broken up? Take me away—don't wait for Dunbar—wait for nothing, but take me away before—those demons will find me again!" panted Rank, shivering anew.

"Dunbar? Did he save you from—did he bring you here?" cried the detective, in amazement.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SAUL SUNDAY MAKES AN ARREST.

"I DON'T know—he said—I think he said his name was Dunbar," faintly uttered the poor fellow, his deep-sunken eyes roving nervously about the little hut.

Choking back his burning curiosity, Saul Sunday produced his pocket-flask once more and coaxed the invalid to drink freely. If he was thus risking the final extinguishment of that flickering reason, he was too thoroughly excited to see as much, just then.

"It gives me back—not nerves, for they've clean deserted me," sighed Rank, a faint tinge of color coming into his hollow cheeks. "But it begins to warm my blood. That's been like melted ice—may you never know what it is to be—never know what I've suffered!"

"Try to forget it, dear fellow. It's all gone and past, now. I'm standing between you and those evil wretches. All I need is another hint or two, before bringing them in. You can help me if you will."

"Stoop and let me see your eyes—so!" and Carl Rank gazed long and eagerly into the face that bent over him, giving a relieved sigh at the end. "I can trust you. Your eyes are true and brave. You'll never let those hell-hounds bury me alive again?"

"Never, as Heaven hears me!"

"Then—what can I tell you of service? I'm so—so miserably weak! I'm only the ghost of my old self!"

"Try to brace up by thinking that all you say now will be helping to fetch your enemies to the gallows, Rank. First—how were you saved and brought here? Who by, and when?"

"I can't tell—it brings back that awful sickness and makes my brain whirl until I fear I'm going mad! All I can say—he saved me—he said he was the man who wrote to me as a detective, to come out here and break up a notorious gang of outlaws."

"What did he look like? If he was Dunbar—I'll describe him, and you can say if he's the man."

When Saul Sunday finished a brief but clear picture of the man whom he had known as Enos Dunbar, Carl Rank feebly nodded his head.

"I think—yes, that describes him. He isn't—he hasn't saved me to torment me still more horribly?"

"Not if he is the man I have described," gravely replied the detective, but troubled far

more than he dared show. "When was he with you last?"

"Not since yesterday, though he promised to be here early this morning. It was because I feared something had happened to him, that made me so badly unnerved, a bit ago. I thought that he had been caught and punished by those devils! And then— I can't help myself, you see," with a pitiful attempt at rising to his feet. "I'm all broken up! And—but you'll not desert me, dear friend?"

"If I do, may Heaven desert me in my hour of greatest need!" impulsively cried the detective, his heart warning to that pitiful wreck. "But if Dunbar should come this way before—"

"He is coming now!" interrupted the invalid, his hearing preternaturally sharpened by the awful trial which had so shattered his nerves. "I can hear him—"

"Don't say a word, then, but let me take him by surprise," hastily muttered Sunday, taking up his position where the door would hide his person as it swung open. "If a friend, all right; if your secret enemy, I'll put the nippers on him—too quick!"

He strained his ears to catch the sounds of an approaching footstep, but for several seconds he listened in vain. But just as he was beginning to flush up at having been betrayed by a crazy fellow's wild fancies, he caught the sound.

From where he stood, he could not gain a sight of the new-comer, and with those strong doubts filling his mind, he dared not make a move by which the suspicions of that comer might be awakened. All he could do was to wait, bracing his muscles for a possible encounter with a desperate foe.

The door swung open, and a cheery voice called out as its owner crossed the threshold:

"Wide awake and looking mighty chipper, eh, partner?"

"Shall I put you to sleep, Dad Filkins?" sternly uttered Saul Sunday, stepping from his covert, holding a cocked revolver within a yard of the fellow's head. "Steady, you rascal! I'll blow your roof off at the first crooked move!"

The bumper of the Wigwam shrunk back involuntarily at that first sentence, but as he seemed to recognize the speaker, something like relief came into his face and eyes.

"You've got me, pardner, an' I'm mighty glad of it. Will you put the darbies on, or trust to my word not to try to kick over the traces? Either way'll suit me—'way up!"

"I'll trust you when I can't do better, Dad. Turn about and march to the wall, then put your hands behind you. And see that you keep your fingers empty the while, too!"

Cool and steady, Filkins obeyed orders, making no sign of resistance or of uneasiness when Saul Sunday deftly applied a pair of handcuffs as his wrists came together behind his back.

"Now if you'll let me have a seat, pardner, reckon I can make some things a little bit clearer to your eyes," he said, calmly.

"Not by throwing dust into 'em, Dad," laughed the detective, now standing where his rear was guarded by the fireplace, while with his pistols he fully commanded the only way of ingress. "Take a seat if your tongue can wag more freely for that. I'm just yearning to hear you pipe up—provided you sing true to note."

"You're a detective, then, after all?" asked the prisoner, eying Sunday with strange eagerness underlying his assumed coolness.

"Not that tune—some other tune, Dad, please," nodded Saul.

"I suspected as much, from the very start!"

"When you were flourishing around as Yellow Pile, Dad?"

The unmasked Gamecock nodded assent, seemingly unmoved by the fact of his double character being divined by an officer of the law. "I was certain of it later, when you got into that racket at the Wigwam, but I only suspected it the night before. Then, when the chief knocked Mr. Rank silly, and we found his commission on his person, I thought he must be the one I sent for."

"I can guess the rest. You helped plant him; did you help fasten that spider on his breast, Dad Filkins?"

A weak, horrified cry broke from the lips of that poor fellow, and something like remorse crept into the weatherbeaten face of the old man as he saw Carl Rank fall back insensible.

"You wouldn't believe me now, Mr. Sunday, even if I were to tell you the whole truth and take oath to that effect. You'd swear I was trying to lie myself out of a nasty hole."

"And of course I'd wrong you terribly in even thinking that way?"

"You just would," with a grave nod.

"Is it worth wasting time over, then? Hadn't you better plead guilty without straining your poor brain in hatching up impossible excuses?"

"You've got the drop, pardner, and whatever you say 'll have to go, so far's I can see," lightly laughed the prisoner.

His manner puzzled Saul Sunday far more than that worthy would have cared to admit, off-hand. And though he schooled his face most admirably, he kept on the keen alert, more than half expecting an attack in force by friends of the captive.

Dad Filkins knew that aid was close at hand.

On no other hypothesis could that cool, even careless demeanor be accounted for.

"I have got the drop, as you observe, my fine fellow, and I'll make the best possible use of it the first sign I see or hear of your fellow rascals trying to chip in. You can guess what use that will be?"

"I've guessed tougher conundrums in my time; but that don't apply to my case, pardner. I haven't the ghost of an idea that another human will enter this little hollow inside of a week at the nearest. And if any such should stumble in on us, I'd be only too happy to help you fire them out again."

"So your lips say, but—"

"Well, you're the worst case of a Doubting Thomas I ever see!" and there was just a touch of angry contempt in the deep-set eyes of the old man.

"Play I was born that way, and try to resign yourself to the inevitable, Daddy."

"All right. I'll talk without asking credit in advance, then. And first: I sent for a detective to come here, and yonder poor devil answered the call, though he never warned me when to look for or expect him. If he had—but you hinted for me not to enter into that lot?"

"Who the deuce are you, anyway?" exploded Sunday half-angrily, half-wonderingly.

"A man who has offered to sell out the Gamecocks to justice, but who had begun to fear he'd have to do the work all by himself!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

BEGINNING OF THE END.

"You sent for him to help you?" asked Sunday, giving a nod toward that white, silent face. "You admit that you thought he was the man when we were captured that night. Why didn't you save him?"

"Didn't I give both him and you a chance to get away?"

Despite his oft-tested nerve, Saul Sunday recoiled slightly from that cold speaker, a wild, strange fancy leaping into life at those words.

Was this the real solution of that hideous mystery? Was Dad Filkins the pitiless power behind the Death Spider?

"You gave us— You killed Clay Savage?"

"I did not kill Clay Savage," came the clear, steady reply. "That was the work of Wallace Yarrow, who—but that isn't in the contract. I found the lad, and that gave me a chance to help you both. If Carl Rank wasn't smart enough to improve it as well as you did, who has he to blame but himself?"

"The one who bit him with that infernal spider! Did you do that, Dad Filkins?"

"I did," was the reply, still colder than ever. "I did it to save him from a surer death. If I hadn't been swift with my proposal, the chief would have slit his throat, blown his roof off, or run him up a tree where no trickery could avail aught."

Saul Sunday shivered slightly as he gazed for a brief space on that poor wretch, lying on his pallet in a semi-stupor. He was so terribly changed for the worse! Wouldn't it have been a mercy if Dad Filkins had left him to meet a sure and sudden death by one of the methods he so coolly mentioned?

Better death than life in death, like this!

"I know what you're turning over in your mind, Saul Sunday," added the prisoner, showing a little more energy in his manner. "I've told you all I choose to tell in that line. Now—will you take the job I held ready for Rank? Will you agree to fill your own pockets while doing the whole country an inestimable service? Will you break up the Mountain Gamecocks if I show you where they roost?"

"Who are the head ones in that gang?"

"Ambrose Savage, Boyd Savage, Dad Filkins," came the instant response. "That's heavy enough blind. Cover it, as a sign that you'll stay in, and I'll maybe come at you again with an eye-opener."

Saul Sunday moved forward, and stooping, gazed keenly into those peculiar eyes. They never wavered, giving him back look for look. Yet even now he could not fully believe the words his own ears had drank in. It seemed impossible that this wretch, whom he had seen so fully trusted by the leaders of that evil gang, could have been playing a double part all the while.

"And you expect to save your neck by turning informer on your fellow-rascals?"

"Put it that way if you like it better so," impatiently frowned the old man, adding sharply:

"Is there no way I can get through that cowardly caution of yours, man? Is there nothing I can say to make you even begin to put trust in my offers?"

"Tell me where the coniacs have their headquarters, Dad!"

"In the same Den where the Gamecocks roost."

"And that is—just where?"

"Where you'll never find it without my help," assuming a dogged air. "Trust for trust, or no trust at all. I've said all I can to show you I'm more than eager to help make your fortune—for a name is a fortune to a detective—but you're afraid to risk even a chance."

"Maybe I know more than you're inclined to

give me credit for, Dad. For instance: were you with the old man and his hopeful, last night at Dunbar's?"

"I was. I rolled the fat wench into the ditch. Didn't she tell you as much?"

"What was done with Miss Dunbar?" slowly demanded the detective, keenly watching the face of his prisoner, fearing the worst yet keeping hope alive. "You took her away with you?"

"Will you believe that I'm just what I claim to be, if I show you where the girl is?"

"Do that, and I'll begin to trust you—yes!"

"It's a bargain!" flashed Filkins, adding with a dry laugh: "I'd offer to shake on it, but I hate to turn my back on a gentleman."

Saul Sunday moved closer, deftly removing the weapons from the man's belt, coolly saying as he unlocked the handcuffs:

"I'll risk your pulling a hidden gun before I can drop you cold, Dad. I'm lightning on a snap-shot, people say!"

Filkins shook himself, rubbed his wrists a bit, glancing at Carl Rank who was watching them through his half-closed lids, shivering by fits and starts.

"Poor devil! he's got all the worst of this racket, so far. But he'll pull through all right, and be a man again, if all goes well. We must leave him here, of course, but I'll see that he lacks nothing. Now, Sunday, I'm ready for a little tramp, if you are."

"You fully understand what will happen if you try to lead me into a trap, without full warning, of course?"

"Of course. Don't waste daylight by going over all that again. If you really want to find the Dunbar girl, follow my lead."

He turned and left the cabin, closely followed by Saul Sunday. The detective held a pistol ready in his right hand and never kept his senses more fully on the alert than during that short hour consumed by their walk through the wilderness of rocks and scrub.

At the end of that period, Dad Filkins paused, pointing out a vine-lashed bush growing close to the base of a steep, sloping rock.

"Behind that bush is a hole. In that hole, hardly big enough to be called a cave, you'll find the girl. Shall I show you the way, or would you rather go ahead?"

"After you is manners, Dad. And don't forget that I'm mighty quick on the trigger when I'm unexpectedly introduced to company."

"All the company you'll meet in yonder will be Miss Dunbar. And she'll hardly object to the coming of a friend of her father's."

Without further explanation, Dad Filkins led the way, pushing back that screen of vines with one hand, while with the other he took a pocket-lantern from a crevice just inside the gloomy entrance, holding it up for Sunday to accept or not, as he saw fit.

"Shall I light it, or would you rather?"

"Strike a light, Dad. It'll be a help to my aim, perhaps."

The lantern was quickly lit, and the two men stepped behind the leafy curtain. And a low, startled cry of horror burst from the lips of the detective as the rays fell over the ghastly white face of Weltha Dunbar, seemingly cold in death!

"You devil!" he hoarsely gasped, gripping Filkins by an arm and thrusting his pistol against a temple. "You've murdered her with your infernal spiders!"

"She's not dead, but sleeping—by my soul I swear it!"

Just in time came those impressive words—still more impressive from the tone in which they were uttered. A moment later, and Dad Filkins would have died like a dog.

"Look at the spider, and you'll see it's the same one that laid out Dale Savage for the grave," he added, quickly. "Ambrose Savage used it on the poor child, but he didn't know what I'd found out; that the second time of using only throws into a trance instead of killing."

"You mean—"

"That Miss Dunbar is alive. That she hears every word you and I are speaking, though she can't break the spell that holds her physical powers under thrall, until the poison left after being once used, has time to waste itself. Then—she'll wake up, bright as ever!"

"Like poor Rank? Better death than such a wreck!"

"He had no hope—he knew he was being buried alive, and I had no chance to give him a cheering word. With her—almost from the very first she has had that hope to sustain her."

All this but strengthened Sunday's suspicions that at last he had solved the mystery surrounding the Secret Slayer—that Dad Filkins was the one who had wrought such terrible work of late, and unable to choke back his hot emotions, he flatly accused the fellow.

"I neither deny nor affirm," was the dogged retort. "I have kept my word. Here lies Miss Dunbar, and before midnight she will herself tell you that I have spoken only the truth. That Carl Rank lives, ought to reassure you on that point. Now—guard her, take her back to her father, and bid him watch over her more carefully. Or, if you want to make a clean sweep this very night, wait here until I come for you."

"I'll see that the rats are holed, and come back to lead you to spring the trap. Dare you trust me so far?"

"If I must?" hesitated the detective, uneasily. "Accept my terms, or lose your choicest prizes forever!"

"All right. I'll trust you. If you fail me, I'll run you down and hang you, true as there's a heaven above our heads!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE SPIDERS LAST VICTIM.

BOYD SAVAGE opened the door of the little cabin built with its back close against the hill, a faint glow coming into his haggard eyes as he recognized the figure without.

"Come in, Dad! What's the best word?"

"None too good, boss," was the gloomy response as the door closed and was barred behind the Gamecock. "It's a regular hornets' nest, down yonder, and there's a dozen ropes noosed for each neck in the outfit!"

"What of Dunbar: was the report true?"

"Worse luck—yes! They say he'll be all right in a day or two. The Kid saved him just in time."

"Take that back, curse you!" came a hoarse, choking growl as a pair of giant arms caught and heaved him high above that leonine head, ready to dash him to the flooring of trampled earth. "Don't dare say a son of mine saved the enemy of his race! Don't—"

"Don't you, father!" sternly cried Boyd, catching his arm just in time to save the fellow from death. "Have we so many friends, now, that you must kill the best, truest, keenest one of all? Put Dad down, or kill me with him!"

With a deep, bitter groan the old man yielded, lowering the ghastly pale man to the floor, brushing a trembling hand across his eyes as he dizzily staggered back to the rear wall.

"I didn't—look over it, Dad, good friend. It made me mad—to hear even you speak of—it was a lie! Say it was a lie!"

Filkins made no reply, his eyes doggedly fixed at his feet.

But words could not have spoken plainer, and Ambrose Savage shivered like one in a serious chill.

"Then—I have only one boy left! Boyd, say that you'll help me curse the—that lash-scarred cur!"

"I'll do more than that. I'll help you punish him, father," coldly said his first-born, opening the secret door which gave entrance to the cave in which their counterfeiting was done.

When he returned, which was not until some little time afterward, Boyd Savage found Dad Filkins cooking meat and broiling coffee at the wide fire-place.

"I'm mighty sharp-set, boss, and from the way you look 'round the gills, I reckon you've forgot to be hungry. A cup of coffee 'll do you heap good, lad!"

"Maybe: I don't know," wearily muttered the other, sinking to the floor with a sigh that was almost a groan. "Dad, don't fret over the way the old man treated you, for he's like me—mighty nigh crazy over all that has happened."

"Don't I know that, boss?" with a softened tone as he took the pot of coffee from the fire. "What with Boss Clay, and Boss Dale, and the Kid, and old Dunbar getting—"

"Don't say any more, curse you!" flashed Boyd, starting to his feet and tramping back and forth like a caged panther. "You mean well, but talk will drive me clean crazy!"

"It's sleep—a good long sleep that you want most, boss," softly said Dad, pouring a stream of fragrant coffee into a tin cup on the table. "Sometimes coffee'll drive sleep away, others it'll fetch the cobwebs in a hurry; and right now's one o' them last. Drink that off, boss, hot as ye kin swaller it. An' ef it don't lend ye a mite o' rest inside an hour, I'll eat my hat 'stead o' these good steaks!"

More to get rid of that kindly advice than through a belief in the efficacy of Dad's prescription, Boyd Savage caught up the cup and swallowed the almost scalding contents.

"Now ef you'll take a bit lay down—so!" added Filkins, spreading a blanket where the warmth of the fire would have the most grateful effect. "Why I'll stan' guard an' fill a mighty holler 'bout the equator o' my own self at the same time."

It was rarely that Boyd Savage took kindly to advice, even from one whom he trusted so implicitly as he did Dad Filkins; but now he stretched his athletic figure on the blanket without a word.

He had spoken no more than the truth when he said that he was almost crazy. Those swift-falling, terrible blows from an unknown quarter had nearly broken down even his superb physique. And now—not only had their prime enemy escaped the punishment allotted him, but he had been rescued from death by one who, by rights of his birth, should have killed instead of sparing.

That was the last bitter blow. And it seemed to be the final feather.

Dad Filkins seated himself at the table in such a manner that he could watch the door, the sleeper, and the secret opening in the rear wall, all at the same time. And eating deliberately,

he performed the manifold duties he had set for himself.

By the time he was through eating, Boyd Savage was sleeping heavily, one arm flung carelessly across his face to keep the light from his eyes, the other resting on his bosom.

Dad Filkins rose from his seat, touching the sleeper with a foot, watching keenly to see if that touch startled him, or made his slumbers any the less sound.

"He's got it—strong and heavy!" muttered the man, his eyes filling with a strange glitter as he turned away toward the secret door. "Now if the old man is quiet!"

Opening the door, he entered a narrow passage cut into the hill, soon coming to a second door, barred heavily and fastened snugly in an arch cut through the rock. Cautiously opening this, he peered through, to draw back a moment later with a silent laugh.

"Sound asleep! Dreaming, perchance? Of what? Of Wallace Yarrow? Of Kate, the beautiful, the frail? Who knows?"

Swiftly retracing his steps and entering the cabin, Dad Filkins stood with folded arms as he looked down at that sleeping giant.

"It's his face and figure—more like than ever, now he's begun to pay the penalty! Only begun, you spawn of a human devil!"

His voice grew hoarse, almost inarticulate, as he hissed those passionate words. The sound startled him, and he glanced swiftly around, with a hand stealing into his bosom where—what was the object he drew forth?

The dull red rays of the fire reflected from its smooth surface as his hand moved. The yellow light of the lamp brought into relief the rude carvings which marked its back.

"W.—5.—Y."

"'Twas nothing—only my own voice!" muttered the man, brushing his free hand across his face. "I was a fool. What can disturb me, now that the supreme hour has come—after so many long, weary, haunted years! What can rob me of my vengeance now? Neither man, angel nor devil!"

Softly as a panther in his movements, Dad Filkins crossed the room and unbarred the door, like one who is not so utterly wrapt up in lust of revenge as to neglect providing against an untimely surprise.

This done, he stole back and dropped on his knees beside that unconscious figure: a giant in size and strong enough to tear that aged enemy limb from limb—if he would only wake to realize his hideous peril in time!

Holding the Death Spider behind his back, thumb and finger lightly resting on the spring that worked the claws, Dad Filkins touched the arm which lay across the face of the one whom he had marked for his fifth victim.

A gentle pressure, all the time in readiness to flash that terrible instrument around for use in case the sleeping giant should rouse up, despite the powerful drug of which he had partaken so freely.

Not a move, not a sign that Boyd Savage felt that touch.

His fingers closed more firmly, and the avenger moved that arm, his reddish eyes glittering like living coals the while.

Without the slightest resistance beyond its own dead weight, that arm was bent downward until the muscular hands lay crossed over his steadily throbbing heart.

"Ready for the sacrifice, spawn of a human devil!" chuckled the avenger, bringing his right hand around and holding the Death Spider poised above that calm, still, deeply-lined face. "Pity I had to lock your brain fast, but here's the key to undo that! One touch—an outleaping of these pretty claws—then—your brain will waken, even as your body dies! Then you'll begin to realize what punishment means, and suffer a death with each moment that passes by!"

"Slumbering peaceful as a babe in arms. Resting for the first time since this hand—the hand of Wallace Yarrow, the spawn of the devil!—clapped the Death Spider to the cheek of your beloved brother, Clay Savage! So restful, 'tis almost a pity to— Take it, son of Satan!" he harshly snarled, lowering his hand until the hideous image touched that high, white forehead.

The claws flew out, and one more victim marked that horrid score!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE CUP OF VENGEANCE RUNS OVER.

A CONVULSIVE shudder shook that athletic figure from crown to sole as those venomous claws bit through the skin and into the flesh.

Those heavy lids flew open, an expression of unutterable horror leaping into those great blue eyes.

But beyond that shiver, that parting of the lids, that faint, hardly perceptible quivering of the fingers as his hands lay crossed over his heart, Boyd Savage gave no signs of life. And no other being in the wide world would have believed him other than stone dead, save the man who crouched by his side; and he had turned demon over his bitter wrongs.

"Master—boss—Boyd Savage!" mockingly hissed the avenger as he glared down into those

glazing eyeballs. "Remember your oath of vengeance! Don't forget how fiercely you swore to tear limb from limb the man of the Death Spider when fate should bring you face to face with the scourge of your race! Don't forget—for he is here, spawn of Satan! He is kneeling by your side, drinking deep from the cup of vengeance! He is but a babe in size and strength beside you, magnificent brute: you might almost crush his life out between a thumb and single finger. You might—but will you?"

"Hardly, Boyd Savage, while the Silver Spider clings to your skin! Hardly, while that cunning poison holds you paralyzed in all save brain!"

"Are you beginning to see what a purblind fool you have been through all these long months, Boyd Savage? Are you beginning to marvel how you could have been so thoroughly befooled by—shall I say it?"

"Dad Filkins no longer, spawn of Satan! Wallace Yarrow! The man who lost his wife, home, honor, mind, life—all at the brutal hands of your father, Ambrose Savage! Do you understand, man with the dead body and living brain? Can you begin to comprehend the whole truth?"

"I put the Death Spider against the face of your particular pet, Clay Savage! I was the one to strike Dale Savage while he was fighting a shadow! And I have marked you with the Silver Spider—I, Wallace Yarrow, the miserable wretch who—"

Bending over his latest victim, the crazed avenger spoke swiftly, his voice filled with a horrible triumph as he detailed his awful deeds.

So wholly was he occupied thus that he neither saw nor heard the secret door at the rear of the cabin swing open under the touch of Ambrose Savage, who paused with one foot inside the room, struck dumb and numb with horror at that fearsome sight.

Only for a brief space. Only until his blood-shot eyes could fairly recognize that emblem of death. Only until his ears could catch and fully comprehend the meaning of that fiercely triumphant confession.

Then a wild, hoarse, maddened roar filled the building, and Wallace Yarrow lifted his eyes to see that human avalanche leaping upon him.

So swiftly that he had no time to rise to his feet, nor even to drop hand to a weapon.

Those muscular fingers closed upon his shoulders. Those mighty arms heaved him upward until his flying feet struck viciously against the rafters. Then, with a curse of deadly hatred and vengeance, Ambrose Savage hurled the crazed assassin down upon the hard floor.

Rebounding, the body fell in a quivering heap against the wall, crushed and crippled, if not instantly slain.

Ambrose Savage never gave the body a second glance, but heavily fell on his knees at the side of his first-born—the fifth to feel the hideous vengeance of Wallace Yarrow.

A choking groan parted his lips, as his sunken eyes rested on that silver image, on the tiny drops of blood that marked where the fatal fangs had taken firm hold.

The frightful past told him that he could do nothing. Told him the fiendish avenger had only too surely dealt him his final blow.

For even if the power to strike again remained, would he cut his satanic triumph short? Was not this life a thousand-fold more bitter than the most painful death?

"Boyd, my first-born! My boldest, bravest, truest lad of all! Dead—and I still live? If I might have died for you, lad!"

His head bowed until it touched those crossed hands. His mighty frame was racked with agony all the more intense and bitter that it could find no vent in words, cries or groans.

That heap against the wall shivered—moved—slowly raised until a human head showed against the rough stones. Two eyes began to reflect the firelight as they fastened upon those figures before the fireplace.

Crippled, not dead, Wallace Yarrow had thoughts only for completing the vengeance he had so terribly begun.

Only a few feet from where he lay with painfully contorted limbs, a Silver Spider shone dimly on the floor.

It bore the figure 6, and had fallen from his bosom when the giant dashed him to the earth.

If he could only reach it! If he could crawl close enough to touch that bowed figure! Then welcome death, after he had told his arch-enemy all!

But that fierce lunging was never to be fulfilled.

He had no power over his limbs. His body seemed paralyzed from his shoulders down, though his brain was never more active.

"Ambrose Savage!"

The giant gave a convulsive start, lifting his head far enough to cast a dim, dizzy glance into the face of his dead—his last son, the best and bravest of them all.

"Thief, forger, counterfeiter, murderer of helpless women!"

The giant turned slowly, unsteadily, staring with a dazed look at that crippled heap, his own tones husky and indistinct:

"Dad—is it you, Dad Filkins?"

"It was Filkins—it is Wallace Yarrow!"

"Wallace Yarrow?" and the giant brushed a trembling hand across his aching eyes and brow. "He's dead. I killed him. I stood by his grave, one day, and asked him to forgive me. Did he say yes? I—I don't know. Somehow I can't remember things as—"

"Can't you remember Archer and Marsh and Clay and Dale and—have you forgotten your last, bravest, truest son of all, Ambrose Savage? Have you forgotten gallant Boyd? If so—what is that shining thing on his face? Is it sucking his blood? Is it—"

With a choking cry the sorely stricken man caught that death emblem from where it rested and hurled it into the fire.

"Too late, you devil!" shrilly laughed the avenger, his eyes seeming wells of living flame. "Can you tear the venom from his veins? Can you blow the breath of life into his lungs? Can you save him from the grave? Ha! ha! ha! If you only knew what the grave means to your dearly beloved son, Ambrose Savage! If you only knew—if you could only begin to guess all that little word implies!"

The giant slowly, feebly rose to his feet, supporting his curiously benumbed limbs by leaning heavily upon the rude table. His dull eyes were fixed on that helpless, yet never more malignant heap of flesh and blood lying against the stone wall.

"I don't—you are Dad Filkins? Yet—Dad was true—Dad was honest and faithful. Dad couldn't make sport—you gibbering devil! Who and what are you that dares to mock my sorrows?"

"An avenging spirit, risen from the grave to punish you, Ambrose Savage," with a repetition of that shrill, unearthly laugh. "The spirit of the poor devil whom you murdered, body and soul! The man whose wife you stole away! The man whom you trampled under foot because he dared to resent the vile shame you poured upon him!"

"Wallace Yarrow—merciful Heaven!"

"Ay! you devil in human guise—Wallace Yarrow! The Silver Slayer, if you like the term better! For—listen, you shivering cur!"

"It was my brain that invented the Death Spider. It was my skill that compounded the subtle poison which has more than killed off your accursed tribe. It was my hand that caused each spider to bite. My hand that doomed Archer, and Marsh, and Clay, and Dale, and Boyd—all Savages, all equally evil and wicked and deserving worse than death!"

"Wallace Yarrow—alive?"

"Ay! alive, though dying! And yet—never more completely avenged than now—now, when I say unto you, Ambrose Savage, that you have aided me in my vengeance—that you have buried each one of four beloved sons—*alive!*"

For a single breath that gigantic figure swayed dizzily, seemingly stricken to the very heart. But then—with a hoarse, choking roar of indescribable hatred and revenge, Ambrose Savage leaped forward and caught that crippled mass in his hands.

But before he could do more—before he could crush out that remnant of life—the front door swung open and Saul Sunday leaped inside, revolver clubbed in his right hand.

One stroke, and Ambrose Savage fell like a log.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

SAUL SUNDAY'S SCOOP.

ALTHOUGH seemingly yielding to the terms offered by Dad Filkins, Saul Sunday had accepted them with a mental reservation.

Even yet he did not fully trust this man, whom he so strongly suspected of being the power behind the Silver Slayer, and though Dad Filkins cast many a doubting glance behind him during those first few minutes, after leaving the little cave in which rested Weltha Dunbar, he did not suspect that a cunning shadow dogged him to the very door of the haunted cabin.

Satisfied that he had at last made the important discovery of the counterfeiters' den, Saul Sunday stole away, bent on still further work.

At one point of that journey, Dad Filkins had paused, to turn aside from a direct line, spying upon a strong body of whites, who had just halted for the night, their bright fire attracting his attention.

Rightly divining that this party was from P. M. City, out in quest of those who had committed such an atrocious outrage in town, the past night, Saul hastened to join them, making himself known, showing his papers to the leader, and asking their aid in completing the work he had so well begun.

If the strangers were at first inclined to doubt his claims, Saul speedily convinced them that he was in sober earnest, by guiding them to the cave where Weltha Dunbar lay, so deathlike in looks.

He told the strange story he had heard from the lips of Dad Filkins, and though he could not go quite so far as to say that he fully believed it, he left two men on guard over the maiden—men who knew her well, and whom she would

recognize with perfect trust, if ever life and sensibility should return to her.

With the others Sunday hastened back to the haunted hut, nearing the spot just as that maddened roar burst from the mentally-tortured giant.

And out-footing his men, the detective burst open the door—which, it will be remembered, Dad Filkins had left unbarred for use in case he should be surprised before his deadly work was done—and with a heavy stroke knocked the giant senseless, just in time to save his crippled enemy.

Dad Filkins, or Wallace Yarrow, was not too badly hurt to tell the detective where the remainder of the Mountain Gamecocks were to be found at roost, and, half an hour later, the entire gang were captured, almost without a blow being struck on either side.

And then, thanks to the secret door which Ambrose Savage had left open when he surprised the Silver Slayer, the mystery of the counterfeiters' den was solved.

The plates, with vast quantities of work, both ready for issuing and in an incomplete condition, were found, together with ample proofs through which many Eastern confederates might be "gathered in," were taken possession of by the man from San Saba.

Meanwhile, Ambrose Savage had recovered his senses to find himself heavily ironed hand and foot. But he did not seem to fully realize his perilous situation. His sunken eyes never moved from the ghastly pale countenance of his first-born, who lay near by, that tiny red patch on his forehead alone betraying where the Silver Spider had fastened its fatal claws.

Wallace Yarrow, his limbs shattered, his spine injured, his internal hurts slowly but surely bearing him down to the grave, kept a clear and active brain to the very last.

And when Saul questioned him, he spoke freely as long as his powers lasted.

He sketched the story of his past: dark and tragic, inexcusable unless the plea of a crazed brain be accepted.

He admitted that, as his unsettled brain had invented the Death Spider, so his single hand had dealt those five terrible blows.

He entered fully into details, but his words need not be closely traced at this late stage; even when briefly hinted at, the truth is terrible enough.

Though poisonous, the bite of the Silver Spider was not intended to produce death, in itself. It benumbed the body, suspending the physical functions for many hours, while leaving the brain painfully active. He said that those under the spell could hear and comprehend every word that was uttered near them; and that, if kept above ground for forty hours, at the very extreme, they would revive, to speedily recover from the effects of that subtle venom.

With a shiver of unspeakable horror, Saul Sunday turned away from that physical wreck, so helpless in body, yet so fiercely triumphant in mind—a Lucifer in heart—a mad avenger in every impulse.

Leaving his prisoners under guard, the detective hastened away through the gray dawn, to visit the cave where Weltha Dunbar had been found, to learn that she had regained her senses, and was now quietly sleeping, after having made a comfortable meal.

Wallace Yarrow never left the haunted cabin alive. His death was painless, his brain living to the last, clear and hideously exultant over the awful vengeance he had inflicted on his enemies for their father's sins of the long ago.

"Only one—only Number Six left unused!" he faintly muttered, as he neared the end. "The Kid—half-breed—didn't count. And Ambrose—better so! He suffers worse, knowing that he buried his whelps alive!"

That these words were true, found proof in the fact that Boyd Savage, after many hours, awoke to renewed life, though his usually wonderful nerve seemed utterly broken down by what he had undergone.

Both he and his father were taken East, to answer for counterfeiting, but only Boyd was brought to trial, found guilty and sentenced to a long term of imprisonment at hard labor. Ambrose Savage faded away, dying with the names of his boys hovering on his lips.

Carl Rank gradually recovered his physical strength, but never served as a detective again. That frightful ordeal of a living burial had forever unfitted him for a life of that sort.

Enos Dunbar recovered from his burns, and when he learned how gallantly Enos Savage had rescued him, he softened toward the son of the man whom he so bitterly hated. For, as he explained, he was the son of a sister to Wallace Yarrow, and from her lips he had learned what bitter cause all of her name and race had for hating the Savage family.

He had long come to believe Wallace Yarrow dead, and no one was more surprised on learning the strange truth of the Silver Slayer than Enos Dunbar.

Weltha seemed to suffer very little from the after-effects of her sore trials. She had been assured by "Dad Filkins" that no harm should

come to her while in that death-like trance, so the ordeal had been lightened greatly.

When she told her father how she had, while seemingly dead, overheard the Savages, Boyd and Ambrose, cursing "the Kia" for refusing to join them in their scheme of vengeance, Weltha completed the conquest begun by Enos himself. And when the trio fully recovered from the effects of that dark night, Enos Dunbar told Enos he might marry Weltha just as soon as he, the father, could settle his business affairs in P. M. City, and journey back to Kentucky.

They are living in the Blue-grass State now, happy and contented, having buried the past by mutual consent, never to unearth its painful memories again.

The Mountain Gamecocks were thoroughly broken up, as a band. Some of the more prominent members of the gang were taken East, to stand trial with their chief, Boyd Savage, for uttering false money.

Others were tried where taken, for highway robbery, to be found guilty and sent to "de-time."

As for Saul Sunday?

Well, he is still "in the harness," and though his precious staff was burned in the fire at the Dunbar residence, he has had another built precisely like it. And with the shells and the little joker, he often spreads his velvet table, "for fun or money," and sometimes for stern and deadly business.

THE END.

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